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Revolutionary Perspectives 26

Fifty Years of the CWO



Rare Earth Magnets are Pulling the World Apart

Adventures in the Culture Wars

"End Times" - Can Capitalism be Saved?

Two Speeches by Onorato Damen from 1925

Revolutionary Perspectives

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Fifty Years of the CWO
Perspectives for 2025 and Beyond

This document was originally drafted in May for the Annual General Meeting of the CWO. Since then a number of events have taken place, key among them Israel's attack on Iran and Trump's threats to impose further tariffs on Europe. On our website you can find further analysis of these developments which only reinforce our perspectives for this period.

In September this year it will be fifty years since the foundation of the Communist Workers' Organisation (CWO), so it is therefore an appropriate moment to review the strengths and weaknesses of our perspective over that time before posing our analysis of where we are today.

Obviously much has changed in half a century but the central bedrock of our Marxist analysis has not. The CWO was formed shortly after the end of the post-war boom or, in Marxist terms, when the third cycle of accumulation of capitalism's imperialist epoch had entered its phase of decline. This crisis had provoked a massive upsurge in the class war across the world. There were already signs of it (May 68 in France being the most dramatic example), even before the US government announced its renunciation of the Bretton Woods agreement of 1944 (which fixed the dollar at $35 to an ounce of gold, and enshrined it as the basic currency of the global financial trading system in all areas of the world not dominated by the USSR). It was this crisis that provided the impetus for the formation of the CWO (in common with many other political forces coming out of the working class at that time). As always in history, attempts at organised political response came a little after the height of those struggles and at a time when it was gradually becoming clear that economism (the struggle for wages rather than a conscious struggle against the capitalist system of wage labour) was dominant everywhere.

Economism was hardly a surprise, even at the time. When we discuss the counter-revolutionary role of Social Democracy we often focus on their support for imperialist war in 1914, and the violent role the parties of the Second International played in crushing the revolutionary wave which brought the First World War to an end, especially in Germany. But that was not where the counter-revolutionary role of Social Democracy ended. Once the isolation of the Russian revolution to a single country eventually produced the state capitalist monstrosity of Stalinism posing as "*socialism*", it was an easy task for Social Democracy to live up to its "power through the ballot box" name. "Democratic socialism" would play a central role in integrating the working class into the capitalist state over the next 50 years. Whilst the trade unions would police the class war and keep it within the bounds of capitalist legality, the state increasingly came to regulate all aspects of social existence. After the Second World War the incipient signs of reviving working class resistance (and against the alternative threat of the USSR's allegedly "*socialist*" society) led the capitalists everywhere to adopt Social Democratic ideas by introducing social security and other welfare benefits. And as the devaluation of the war opened up the possibility for greater profitable investment, the post-war boom that followed became the longest in capitalist history, with the capitalists increasingly able to turn profits into investments creating gradually higher wages for workers and thus a sense of progress for the working class. In

France it was "*les trente glorieuses*" (the thirty glorious years) and in Italy "*il sorpasso*" (the overtaking) whilst to West Germans after the privations of occupation it became the "*Wirtschaftswunder*" (the economic miracle). In the UK, the Conservative Prime Minister could even truthfully tell the electorate in 1957 that "*most of our people have never had it so good*".[1] As in the 1920s, politicians in the Western capitalist world began to argue that capitalism had overcome its repeated crises as we headed into the "swinging Sixties". All this began to unravel in the late 1960s, as the pretence that the US' horde of gold in Fort Knox was equal to the amount of dollars circulating internationally, was undermined by the continuing balance of payments and budget deficits of the US. By abandoning the dollar's link to gold the US opened the way for its devaluation and the era of floating currency exchanges began.[2] The collapse of the post-war boom drew the comrades who founded *Revolutionary Perspectives* to read, first Paul Mattick's *Marx and Keynes* and then, via that, to the volumes of Marx's *Capital*. This resulted in the first draft of *The Economic Foundations of Capitalist Decadence* in 1974 which we are now reprinting and bringing up to the current period (soon to appear as a pamphlet).[3] The more experienced Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista) had also defended the same economic analysis since the 1940s, so after we accepted many of their political critiques of our organisational positions, it became the shared basis for the formation of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party. Subsequently, as new organisations around the world affiliated to it, it would become today's Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT).

Nothing that has happened in the interim has caused us to doubt the basic message of that original analysis; that the central economic contradictions of capitalism are a result of the law of value, and how that explains the tendential fall in the rate of profit. In the age of state capitalism it also explains how in the highly concentrated capitalism of today the competition between capitalists takes the form of imperialist rivalry between states. What had been cyclical crises every decade or so in the nineteenth century became an infernal round of boom-bust-war in the twentieth century.

It has to be said however that the young comrades who founded the CWO did not expect the crisis to be as long drawn out as the current one. Indeed the alternative of "*socialism or barbarism*" seemed to be increasingly on the historic agenda especially after it became clear that the economic crisis of Western capitalism was mirrored by crisis in the USSR's bloc.[4]

But that is precisely what we are still living through. After capitalism's longest (and richest) boom we have since had the longest period of decline in any cycle of accumulation in capitalist history. In the 1970s we did not expect the capitalists would respond to the massive waves of struggle across the world by abandoning national control of the "commanding heights of the economy". After all, in an imperialist world, and after two world wars, control of each state's production of steel and other essential commodities was deemed necessary for national defence. Why would they abandon investment in them? But given the losses they were making, and given the stubborn resistance of workers to accept a decline in living standards, the capitalist class had reached an impasse. The Social Democratic model of the "mixed economy" with its constant printing of money (deficit financing) to "stimulate" economic activity was no longer tenable given the lack of investment due to the falling rate of profit. Printing money in those circumstances only created "stagflation". From 1979 onwards capitalist governments

basically wrote off much of the investment and sacked workers by the millions. Fighting for wages is one thing, fighting for jobs when capital can't, or won't, invest is another. Unemployment was as good a way as any of taming the class war and once the great concentration of workers had been cowed (sometimes in massive battles which the unions managed to keep isolated sector by sector) the system could attempt to restore profitability by denationalisation, deregulation and financialisation. At the same time, Western capital poured into China where the followers of Mao Zedong had been defeated following his death in 1976. The "capitalist roaders" of Deng Xiaoping created Special Economic Zones to bring in Western capital which was only too glad to find cheap and compliant labour to exploit there. The rest can be summed up as what we now know as globalisation, with cheap Chinese commodities battering down all walls (with apologies to Marx). The fact that Western capital now sought the cheap labour of China, and elsewhere, was the clearest confirmation that the labour theory of value explained the real source of capitalist profit. Lower paid workers around the world were creating the commodities which global capitalism profited from. The main beneficiaries of this were China … and the United States. Whilst the one reaped in the rewards of trade, the other was the one state which has been able to go on printing money, as the dollar has remained global currency standard even though it is no longer linked to gold. The "exorbitant" privilege of the dollar has allowed the US to print money to buy what it likes with few consequences at home for the last four decades. The main consequence has been bloated budgetary and trade deficits — whilst the rest of the world has experienced the full force of the crisis. US capital (unlike the US workers who lost better paid jobs only partially compensated for by being able to buy cheap Chinese commodities!) has been living off the rest of the world since then — the precise opposite of the Trump narrative of "everyone has been ripping us off" but we will return to that later.

The Collapse of the USSR

As stated above, we had already identified the economic crisis in the USSR and its empire in the 1970s (which had nothing "soviet" or "socialist" about it) as not only similar to that of the West, but even worse. One of the great myths of the post-war period was that there were two super-powers who dominated the world but, as we noted at the time, the USSR was not even close to competing economically with the US. If it had not used the protection of non-convertible currency (the real Iron Curtain against the West) it too would have fallen under the control of the US. Whereas the latter had remained unscathed by the Second World War, the USSR had survived at the cost of 20 million deaths and much of its infrastructure destroyed. The only way in which it competed with the US was on the military front especially after the acquisition of the nuclear bomb in 1949. It basically looted German heavy industry to replenish what the Nazis had destroyed in the USSR after 1945 but this was not a real asset as it meant it continued to use older technology. Stalin's Five Year Plans after 1928 had only been about building a defence industry, and even in the best growth years there was nothing like the growth in the West. When the crisis struck in the Brezhnev "years of stagnation" the plan of the "planned economy" came to dominate everything to absurd and counter-productive levels, which actually discouraged production in some areas and certainly did not boost productivity. And by the mid 1970s such was the crisis of agriculture that the USSR was

buying grain from the US.

The invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 (the first time since 1945 that the Red Army advanced outside already occupied territory) betrayed a new anxiety in the Kremlin which only worsened with the revival of workers' struggles in Poland in 1980. The invasion brought Cold War tensions to a new level and the USSR and the US began an arms race which caused some to speculate that a Third World War was imminent (especially in 1983 when NATO carried out Operation Able Archer and posted cruise missiles in Europe). With the US only spending 6% of its GDP on armaments but the USSR 25% (which still meant a much lower figure in real terms than the US) the Kremlin recognised that reform was necessary but could not agree on what form that should take[5] and Gorbachev's "glasnost" and "perestroika" only provoked a revolt of the "apparatchiks" who feared for their vested interests and their coup brought the USSR to collapse. The crisis of the USSR was no surprise but the fact that a major imperialist power could collapse without a war for the first time in history only confirmed the fact that it had never been on an equal footing with the US.[6]

The Hubris of Western Imperialism and the Bursting of the Speculative Bubble

Triumphalism in the West at the "end of history" and the beginning of a "new world order" on the international stage was accompanied by the expansion of so-called "neo-liberal" policies in most countries. At the core of it was the handing over of former state-owned assets to private capital, thus enriching the few whilst lowering the wages of the many. In Russia, Western advice was accepted by the Yeltsin regime. It resulted in the transfer of state property to oligarchs who had the insider knowledge and access to capital to buy up all the shares issued to individuals. It led to the collapse of the rouble. In the West, the deregulation of finance and the abandonment of banking safeguards brought in after the Wall St Crash of 1929 led to a fever of financial speculation. This involved trading "assets" which were based on profits not yet realised and, in some cases, would never be realised. All kinds of financial instruments were created which attempted to disguise the fact that loans were issued to those who could not possibly pay them back. We said for years that that the system was unsustainable and thus the 2007-8 bursting of the bubble did not come as a surprise nor did the fact that the state would have to intervene once again as the financial institutions at the heart of the system were "too big to fail". The banks got new injections of cash (Quantitative Easing), as the state took on their debts, whilst the rest of us got austerity.

On the international front the much heralded "peace dividend" at the end of the Cold War never happened. Imperialist rivalry will not go away as long as capitalism exists. In particular, the US still had the hegemony of the dollar to defend, as Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi discovered in 2003 and 2011 respectively. Both had tried to sell oil in currencies other than the dollar, and both were removed and killed by US-led invasions.

The consequences of these Western interventions, like the US' policy in Afghanistan where radical Islamists had initially been supported in their fight against the USSR, was to open the door to the rise of radical Islamist organisations like al-Qaeda and ISIS (backed by Saudi Arabia and Qatar). Those coming from states where Islam is the dominant religion, including migrants and asylum seekers fleeing the very wars (like Syria) that outside imperialist interests have fomented and financed, were now demonised. Islamophobia in the West has been a

significant factor in the rise of a xenophobic populist nationalism there.

It is however not the only consequence. Despite all the expedients to offset the decline in the rate of profit, growth rates have remained lower than at any time in the history of capitalism. Whilst real wages have stagnated, prices have not, and living standards have continued to fall. Those who were already poor (and the not-so-poor) have increasingly had to turn to food banks to survive whilst the lack of affordable housing has only fuelled hatred of anyone seeking asylum in the supposedly richer countries. Meanwhile the coffers of the billionaires of finance and social media companies continue to fill enabling their even stronger influence over the political process. Never has Lenin's observation that there can be no democracy without equality been more apposite. When billionaires can offer millions of dollars for votes, "*democracy for the moneybags*" (Lenin) is out in the open.[7]

The Road to a Third World War

The perspective we first articulated in 1975 about the historic choice between "*socialism or barbarism*" is now closer than ever. As we have been arguing since January 2022[8] all the expedients to attempt to kick-start a new cycle of accumulation are now exhausted and once again we are faced with a world heading down the road to generalised warfare. Nothing that has happened in the meantime has done anything to make us doubt that perspective. On the contrary, the US-led West, by its repeated use of the "economic weapon" has created an alliance of convenience amongst the sanctioned powers (China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea) which has now taken them into conflict with the West. As the war in Ukraine has already demonstrated, this is not a "new Cold War" as some pundits claimed. The situation is totally different. In the Cold War, both the USSR and US were victorious powers and both had more to lose than gain from outright (and possibly nuclear) war, so conflict was not direct. The nearest they came to blows was in proxy wars and manoeuvres on the global chessboard.

Today the situation is entirely different. Given the stagnation of the capitalist system, no power is economically assured of its future, and all have intensifying problems of debt and declining capacity to maintain the kinds of society they have hitherto maintained. The rise of nationalism is not just found in the West. As is now well established, the unintended consequence of US capital seeking greater profits abroad in the face of the class war at home in 1980s and 1990s has been to nurture a challenger to its own hegemony in China. Here, Xi Jinping has cultivated a similar narrow nationalism asserting China's new-found economic strength in contrast to the humiliation of its past treatment by foreign powers. And this nationalism is not confined to rhetoric about retaking Taiwan. China is already ahead of the US in several areas of technology (processing rare earths for example)[9] and in AI. China also has an LEO satellite system that could replace the GPS system currently dominated by the US. This would not only give it increased surveillance over the planet (until now a US monopoly) but allow China to draw poorer states into its orbit instead of using US-based systems.

US military power is still far ahead of the rest of the world, and it is still the only global player in this respect. But cyber-technology and the fact that China has built a more modern fleet, etc., means the gap is closing and there is already a technological arms race between both powers. The rivalry here is not new and not confined to Trump. It was the Obama administration that first recognised the threat when it adopted the "pivot

to Asia" in 2011 but the policy then was to get involved with other Asian states (at the time 40% of growth in the world economy was located there) whilst at the same time maintaining direct links with China. Under both Trump and Biden US policy has become more aggressive towards China but whilst Biden sought to build alliances (AUKUS, etc.) in defence of "democracy" against the "authoritarian" states, Trump's MAGA could be restyled "Make America Go it Alone".

Trump's premise in his MAGA policy is that the US is in decline (otherwise why does America have to "become great" again?). For this he, and all the radical Right leaders in their different ways, don't blame the laws of capital but previous policies that failed to deal with the profound structural crisis the whole world capitalist system now finds itself in. To Trump, past policies like globalisation and investment abroad have "ripped off" America. Now he wants to cut US debts since the servicing costs of these alone amounts to $1.2 trillion which coincidentally is equal to the huge US annual trade deficit. His aim is to cut these amounts by bringing jobs (i.e. investment) back to the US via massive tariffs on commodities made abroad (including those by US firms with overseas production, like Apple).

He also is no longer concerned to present the US as the policeman of the world. He saw the futility of the Bush era "*forever wars against terror*", so his "peace" initiatives, like that in Afghanistan, basically means pulling the US out of an area whatever the consequences. Next is Europe, where Trump has been leveraging every bit of US economic power in both his terms in office. Europe acted as the forward base of the US in the Cold War but NATO has now become "a rip-off" unless the Europeans cough up more money. As we said in the ICT statement in January:

> *... the economy of Europe, the "loyal servant" of the US, has been brought to its knees. In fact, the "Ukraine campaign", was a war between the US and Russia, fought on the backs of the Ukrainians and paid for in economic, commercial and energy terms by Europe. With its energy source cut off, detached from its reliance on Russia and trade relations blocked by sanctions, Germany has entered into recession while France and Italy have seen their rate of GDP growth decline by up to 50% compared to previous levels. Governments have had to revise their growth outlooks downwards resulting in the dismantling of welfare benefits, and the usual repercussions on wages, healthcare and education.*[10]

Europe's subservience to the US has thus increased whilst Ukraine and Russia have fought themselves almost to a standstill making it easier for Trump to make a deal for the US to obtain much-needed Ukrainian rare earths in return for continuing US military aid. The second part of his scheme to browbeat both Ukraine and Russia into a peace deal has not been achieved for the simple reason that in this imperialist conflict there is no basis for peace. Russia will not give up the territory it has conquered at such material cost, and Ukraine cannot sign any deal that would leave it open to yet more attacks.

There is even less scope for a solution of the "Palestinian question" under capitalism. The hypocrisy of the US "two-state solution" was exposed long ago but the post 7 October events have made it quite clear that Israel intends to colonise not only Gaza but the West Bank as well. The massacres in both places are intended to drive the Palestinians out of the territories completely. Trump's arrival in the White House has torn off the mask of US hypocrisy as he openly supported the ethnic

cleansing of Gaza. It also coincided with the fall of the Assad regime in Syria which has completely undermined Iran's so-called "axis of resistance". Even this victory has not been enough for the Netanyahu regime which has continued to attack Syrian targets in order to ensure that no Islamist regime there will ever have the means to fight Israel. As we have said many times, the only viable solution in the Middle East (and elsewhere) is a "no-state solution" where national boundaries cease to exist in a world community of freely associated producers. At present this is only a chimera and what we see instead is the kind of death, criminal atrocity and destruction in the Middle East (and elsewhere like Sudan and Congo) that will be visiting a neighbourhood near us all unless the behemoth of the capitalist system is stopped.

Instead the path to a wider war is looking shorter. Trump's talk of "peace" in Ukraine is just a readjustment to prepare the ground for the one war all the US ruling elite are agreed on. As is now clear, his tariff war has principally only one target — China. Trump may actually believe in the coherence of his vision but most of his policies in the international field seem to be counter-productive. His withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership in his first term for example has only benefited China which has been able to enter into enhanced trade relations with other countries. And to Trump's obvious surprise, China, instead of coming begging for a deal, retaliated to his tariffs of 145% with 125% tariffs of its own. It is a trial of strength which will determine the fate of the world. We do not yet know where the current tariff war will end but given that these are the kind of tariffs not seen since before the Second World War we can only remind ourselves that tariff wars have generally preceded shooting wars.

Here the Ukraine War has been a wake up call for all the major powers. Supplying the weaponry (missiles, shells and tanks) to Ukraine alone over the last three years has exposed the problem of abandoning the "commanding heights" of the economy back in the 1980s and 1990s. Military supply chains are not easy to restart (and this is one factor which will delay a wider global conflict), but rearmament and retooling for war have already begun.

> *World military expenditure reached $2718 billion in 2024, an increase of 9.4 per cent in real terms from 2023 and the steepest year-on-year rise since at least the end of the cold war. Military spending increased in all world regions, with particularly rapid growth in both Europe and the Middle East. The top five military spenders—the United States, China, Russia, Germany and India—accounted for 60 per cent of the global total.*[11]

Warfare rather than welfare is now the main priority with every country increasing military spending, whilst ignoring, or cutting, social programmes. In the UK the government has stepped in to maintain the country's last two blast furnaces at Scunthorpe because the Chinese owners were planning to run the plant down. This would have left the UK as the only G7 country without the capacity to produce its own virgin steel, and would have made it dependent on … China.[12] The German capitalist class are also going for the "guns not butter" strategy, even arguing that arms production will lift the national economy out of recession. But as our German comrades of the Gruppe Internationalistischer KommunistInnen (GIK) have pointed out, such "military Keynesianism" may have short term economic benefits but in the end (as with the Nazis in the 1930s) only leads down the road to war. Needless to say, arms

producing firms shares are now booming.[13]

The other victim of the current heightened international tensions is any concern about global warming and climate change. The capitalist world has never been serious about dealing with climate change[14] but, now that the demands for "energy security" have increased, there is even less interest in net zero, or any other necessary step to reduce global warming. On the contrary, with Trump in charge of the biggest polluter (on a per capita basis) in the world, there was never any chance that there would be any other outcome. Today's decaying capitalist system has more than one way to prepare the annihilation of humanity.

Such are the various material factors which, in all their contradictions, have brought us to today's increasingly deadly and dangerous reality.

How Can the Revolutionary Working Class Respond?

In subjective terms the economic stagnation of the last decade has given rise to the serious growth of the radical Right which goes beyond the Trump presidency in the US. With the traditional parties of the Left and Right having failed to resolve the fundamental problem of low growth the capitalist class is increasingly turning to nationalist populism. In Portugal, Germany, Sweden, Finland, Netherlands and Belgium, anti-immigrant parties now have more than 20% of the vote (and Reform in the UK has the same in opinion polls). With the simplistic message that all the ills of the world are due to migrants they have their scapegoat, and can promise the instant "solution" of deportation and closed borders. With social media outstripping other sources of information all kinds of conspiracies can be, and are, concocted, appealing especially to those workers who have suffered most from the decades-long decline of manufacturing in the old heartlands of capitalism due to globalisation and financialisation. The forces of the radical Right have significant backing, both in political terms, from the current US administration, and financially. Meloni (FdI), Milei (LLA), Farage (Reform), Weidel (AfD), Morawiecki (PiS), Zemmour (Reconquête), Van Grieken (Vlaams Belang), Abascal (Vox), and Ventura (Chega) were all invited to Trump's inauguration (even if for various reasons not all could attend), whilst the likes of Charles Koch, Peter Thiel and Elon Musk, finance social media propaganda and electoral campaigns to spread conspiracy theories and their narrow nationalist agenda.

The rise of the radical Right has been made all the easier because the Left of capital abandoned the working class decades ago to seek votes in identity politics. A strategy which has only divided the working class everywhere. And yet the working class, the majority of humanity who depend on wage work, remains the only real force capable of putting an end to the false alternatives of the capitalist Left and Right. However, they only can apply that force once they are more conscious of what is at stake, and have organised themselves in both the workplace, and in an international political organisation to coordinate the fight against world capitalism.

This will not happen "naturally" as a consequence of workers fighting against further attacks. There is no shortage of obstacles given that the class has been in retreat for decades. The old labour movement has been, to all intents, smashed, but its remnants are still in unions and parties which cannot see beyond finding a way to make capitalism "better" or at best the myth that capitalism can be abolished through the ballot box.

Additionally, the old communities of workers, clustered around some productive unit like a factory, have gone in the old

capitalist countries, whilst the workers in the Special Economic Zones and "maquiladoras", etc., are having to acquire a new tradition of struggle. Everywhere capitalism has done everything it can to reduce the worker to a single individual facing the system, either on short term or zero-hour contracts, or by laughingly giving us "self-employed" status.

But exploitation remains, and from time to time workers still resist as the contradictions of the system are not only not going away but increasing. In the longer term, anything can happen. Even revolution. At some point some workers will be unable to carry on living with the pressures of intensifying exploitation and denigration. They may not succeed at first, but could forge an exemplary model that could inspire workers everywhere to take up resistance. And this would then allow us to confront the next obstacle — the fragmentation and lack of communication between those who already are conscious of the imperative of getting rid of this system.

We said at the beginning that we are still under the shadow of a century of counter-revolution and that has had a divisive effect on revolutionary minorities. By "*revolutionary minorities*" we don't include either those who think capitalism can be reformed, or those who think that the Russian Revolution finally ended in "socialism". There can never be socialism in just one country and the isolation of that revolution of 1917 had by 1921 led to the demise of its original liberating programme and the rise of new form of state capitalism. Millions across the world mistakenly still see this false alternative as their only hope.

By "revolutionary minorities" we mean those that recognise that the Russian revolution did produce the beginnings of a solution of how to create a society without state oppression but which allows workers themselves to actively participate in decision making. The soviets of workers' deputies, directly responsible and recallable by those who elected them at any level of social administration are the historically discovered form of genuine, workable democracy of the working class. Thousands across the world can already see this but the counter-revolution has left us with another terrible legacy — a fear of political organisation. Our contention is that without a new International, a new world workers' party, any struggle which does develop will fall prey to this or that capitalist solution once again, as there will be no clear political organisation to put forward a clear revolutionary programme. Sadly, when we articulate this we are often greeted with cynicism and suspicion. We do not want to repeat the past, but to salvage from the debacle of the counter-revolution those things we need in order to get to a new society. And the task has become even more urgent in recent years given the drive to war and the warming of the planet.

We have always held the view that it will take a noteworthy struggle to get revolutionaries to confront their differences seriously. So far that has not happened, at least not on a scale to force revolutionaries to come together and examine what is needed in the here and now. Although we can take heart from the early signs of refusal to fight in wars in Israel, Russia and Ukraine and evidence on the Palestinian side of rejection of both Israel and Hamas, the conditions for a new International don't currently exist despite the depth of the crisis. This is why in the meantime we have adhered to the "*No War but the Class War*" initiative. It is not a substitute for an international party, and is not its forerunner for the reasons already given, but it is an attempt to work with those who do not necessarily agree on our overall political framework yet do see that the world

is spiralling (and it seems accelerating in the last three years) towards a Third World War. It has had some success, in that committees have been formed in many countries across the world, but we are still faced with several problems. The first is that they have to reach a wider working class than they have so far. But a second is that we are also faced with otherwise broadly sympathetic "political bystanders" who seem to deny the reality of the current period and its dangers. The unwanted legacy of the counter-revolution is still a suspicion of all organisation. In this view, any organisation of the working class is either a "racket"[15] or, as the councilists and autonomists maintain, unnecessary since the spontaneous movement will take care of itself. Our task is to try to convince them that these are mistakes which only disarm us in the face of the class war. The new International is not a government in waiting but the spearhead of those who lead the fight for a different world. A fight that can only be won if the mass of the class take up the lessons of our collective past and organise. If we are serious about what we stand for we need to engage with all who genuinely want a stateless, classless society without exploitation, war, and all the other evils of capitalism, in order to build a modicum of communication and organisation before we are all silenced by the repression of wartime conditions, as happened to our predecessors in two previous global conflicts. That is the burning task of the coming years.

Notes

1. Harold Macmillan's speech in Bedford actually did include a worry about whether it would last. "*Let us be frank about it: most of our people have never had it so good. Go around the country, go to the industrial towns, go to the farms, and you'll see a state of prosperity such as we have never had in my lifetime- nor indeed ever in the history of this country. What is beginning to worry some of us is 'Is it too good to be true?' or perhaps I should say 'Is it too good to last?'*" Apparently the phrase "*never had it so good*" was borrowed from the US Democratic politician, Adlai Stevenson in 1952. *https://oupacademic.tumblr.com/post/72018452731/misquotation-harold-macmillan*

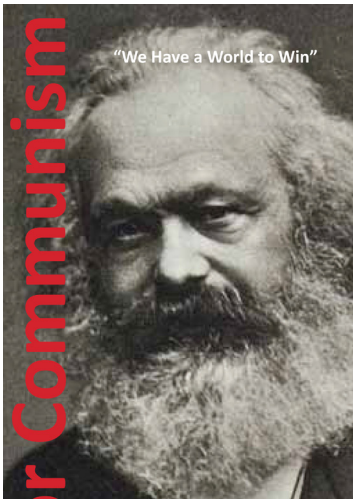
2. Or as we wrote in 2021: "*On 15 August 1971, President Richard Nixon unilaterally announced the "temporary" cancellation of the mainstay of the Bretton Woods agreement: the system of fixed exchange rates based on the direct convertibility of the US dollar to gold. In effect the dollar was the unit of international trade. As trade picked up and countries like West Germany and Japan began to account for a bigger share of international trade, demand for dollars outside the USA grew, as did financial wheeling and dealing on the Euro dollar market. By the early Sixties there were more dollars outside the USA than could be covered by the gold in Fort Knox. As inflation edged up towards the end of the Sixties more and more of those dollars were being converted to gold, increasingly not at the official rate of $35 per ounce. The system was unsustainable. The USA was already running a growing budget deficit, largely due to expenditure on the Vietnam war. But in 1971 the US balance of trade showed negative for the first time since the war. The 'Nixon Shock' spelled the beginning of the end of the Bretton Woods economic frame for the world economy. By the time Nixon confirmed the permanent end to a fixed exchange rate with gold in 1973 the price of gold had reached $100 per ounce. The equivalent price today is around $1,900. Clearly there can be no going back.*" See: *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2021-08-15/1971-2021-50-years-since-the-usa-reneged-on-bretton-woods*

3. To view all six of the chapters of "*Capitalism's Economic Foundations*" start here: *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-08-31/capitalism-s-economic-foundations-part-i*

4. As we wrote in "*The Crisis of Comecon*" in *Revolutionary Perspectives* Series 1 No.7 (1977)

5. A problem compounded by the

successive deaths of First Secretaries, Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko within three years (1982-5).
6. Andropov saw the arms race as a US' plot, not to go to war, but to bleed the USSR's economy white as it tried to compete with defence spending.
7. Although what goes on at elections is pure theatre compared to the influence of lobby groups and other forces on the framing of the policy of the bourgeois state.
8. See "*Ukraine and Taiwan: Flashpoints in an Uncertain World*" from *Revolutionary Perspectives* 19, at *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-02-06/ukraine-and-taiwan-flashpoints-in-an-uncertain-imperialist-world*
9. China is the main source of 5 out of the 10 rare earth minerals and, since this document was first drafted has been blocking their export as part of its retaliation to Trump's tariffs but also because these rare earths are essential for war production. For a deeper analysis of the issue, see the recent article: *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2025-04-06/rare-earth-magnets-are-pulling-the-world-apart*
10. *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2025-02-09/trump-and-the-new-golden-age*
11. According to the Stockholm Institute for Peace Research. See: *https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2025/unprecedented-rise-global-military-expenditure-european-and-middle-east-spending-surges*
12. *https://theconversation.com/what-caused-the-crisis-at-british-steel-254557*
13. For example, Rheinmetall shares traded at less than €85 in 2020 but are today (accessed 26 May 2025) at €1795.00. *https://ir.rheinmetall.com/investor-relations/share/share-price/*
14. And given the fact that all "green" policies seem to be predicated on making workers rather than capitalists pay more, they are an easy target for populist climate change deniers. For our critique of the failures of climate change policies see (for example): *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2024-02-01/cop28-and-the-myth-of-green-capitalism*
15. The word is from the late Jacques Camatte. See: *https://www.marxists.org/archive/camatte/capcom/on-org.htm*



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Rare Earth Magnets Are Pulling The World Apart

There is now a scramble amongst the world powers for once little-known metals called rare earths that are crucial for today's technology, including military technology. China leads global production of rare earth elements and now the US and the rest of the world are trying to catch up. But what are rare earth elements?

Rare Earth Elements: What are they and what are they good for?

The 17 rare earth elements (REEs) are metals with similar chemical properties. More precisely, they are 15 lanthanides — lanthanum, cerium, praseodymium, neodymium, promethium, samarium, europium, gadolinium, terbium, dysprosium, holmium, erbium, thulium, ytterbium, and lutetium — to which scandium and yttrium are added due to sharing similar properties. It took a long time to isolate them all precisely because how similar they are.

REEs are necessary for the production of many technological goods. They have useful optical properties. If you're reading this on a screen, the green light from your screen is generated using terbium, while the red light is produced by a combination of europium and yttrium. Another example is erbium. The infrared light erbium produces can send signals down optical fibres for kilometres, which is why most of the optical fibre applications around the world use signal amplifiers made with it. Fibre-optic cables are the backbone of modern telecommunication; they could even help navigate Arctic sea routes.[1] They will no doubt be targets in a future war.[2]

The magnetic properties of REEs are perhaps the most important. REEs can be used to produce rare earth magnets, powerful permanent magnets (wherein the magnetic field is generated by the internal structure of the material itself) essential to the miniaturisation of technology. The first magnets using the rare earths neodymium and scandium were developed in 1982 and have revolutionised technology since. The tiny motors that power computer hard drives and the miniature speakers on mobile phones and laptops depend on rare earth magnets. Neodymium magnets, the most widely used type of rare earth magnets, are used for MRI scanners and microwave ovens. Rare earth magnets are needed for wind turbines and electric car motors. Electric cars without permanent magnets require bigger batteries and wind turbines without them require more maintenance out at sea. The wind turbine otherwise needs a lot of gears and is thus more prone to breaking down.

REEs also have important military applications. For example, terbium is used for naval sonar systems, light aluminium-scandium alloys are used for aerospace components, yttrium is used in jet engines, and ytterbium is used in decoy flares. The US Department of Defense is behind the US' current effort to diversify its sources of supply.

All this should make it clear why there is an imperialist tug-of-war to get hold of rare earth minerals, with China clearly in the lead. For context, in 2020, China produced 80% of neodymium magnets in the world. Japan produces most of the rest and Germany a tiny quantity as well but crucially both depend on China for the raw materials.

China's Monopoly

A rare earth mineral contains one or more REEs as major metal constituents.

Contrary to what their name indicates, rare earths are relatively abundant in the Earth's crust. However, they do not exist in highly concentrated seams, but are spread out in small amounts over large areas, making them 'rare'. Currently their extraction is only commercially viable with concentrations of about 2% per ton of waste rock. Although rare earths are found across the world, no country has exploited them like China. Deng Xiaoping reportedly declared that "*the Middle East has oil, China has rare earths*". Since the 1990s, China has become dominant in the production of rare earth oxides (REOs), from which REEs can be separated. China accounted for almost 70% of rare earth mining production in 2024, up from 58% in 2021.[3] The Bayan Obo mine in north-east China was responsible for 50% of global production in 2023. Until 2023, China produced 99% of the world's supply of heavy rare earth metals. With the current closure of Vietnam's refinery due to a tax dispute, China has a total monopoly on heavy rare earth metals.

China has a third of the world's estimated rare earth reserves. Brazil, India, Australia, Russia, Vietnam, the United States, Greenland, Tanzania, Canada, South Africa, and Thailand are thought to have the largest reserves. Myanmar, Malaysia, Kazakhstan, Nigeria, and Madagascar also have deposits. North Korea is also thought to have huge reserves. However, rare earth deposits are difficult to estimate. To illustrate, in March the US Geological Survey revised its estimation of Vietnam's reserves from 22 million metric tons down to 3.5 million, making it the 6th rather than 2nd on the list of countries with the largest reserves.[4] This makes the push to diversify supply away from China all the more difficult.

Greenland's reserves partly explain China's attempts to get their foot in the door there, as well as Trump's recently expressed threat that the US would get Greenland "one way or the other".[5] Trump had already explicitly cited anxiety about rare earths as the reason for wanting to purchase Greenland back in 2019 (the US had also previously proposed to buy Greenland in 1867, 1910, and 1946). Greenland has expressed the desire to keep the US away from its minerals, granting a Danish-French consortium permission in May to extract anorthosite (not a rare earth), used in the fiberglass industry, for 30 years, in what has been described as a "blow to Trump".[6] However, Denmark signalled its continued cooperation with the US in June by granting the US new military bases in Denmark's mainland.[7]

While rare earth deposits exist elsewhere than China, it is largely unprofitable to mine them. This is largely because of China's monopoly, but this of course does not explain how this monopoly came into place and is therefore an insufficient answer. Part of the reason is that landlordism does not pose an obstacle to capital being invested in mining as it can in other countries. The capitalist does not need to worry about part of the profit going to the private land owner in the form of ground-rent. Indeed, in China the state owns all mineral resources, regardless of land ownership. To be clear, there is nothing socialist about this, even if this were a full nationalisation of the land. The capitalist mode of production is characterised by the separation of the labourers from the conditions of labour, that is to say from the means of production and land. As Marx pointed out, this separation of the labourers from the land remains "*completely fulfilled if it becomes State property*".[8] This is why Lenin viewed the nationalisation of land as a mere "*bourgeois-democratic measure*".[9] The Chinese state, then, took advantage of this and did all it could to develop rare earth mining by allocating land as it pleased, all while supplying cheap energy and

subsidising the opening of new mines. The domestic market was protected from foreign competition, with extraction restricted to Chinese companies.

China developed this branch of production with little regard for the dangerous working conditions or environmental impact. Rare earths are often found with radioactive elements like thorium and uranium, and separating them out requires a lot of toxic chemicals and hundreds of cubic metres of water which become contaminated with these chemicals. Separating REEs from each other is also difficult given their similar properties. In fact, the main trouble with REEs is not so much mining them than the fact that REEs must be separated from the oxides, refined, and forged into alloys in a highly specialised multi-stage process, before they can be used to produce rare earth magnets. China has established a controlling position at each step of this process, through its state subsidised long-term industrial strategy. The main reason China is ahead of its competitors is therefore not so much because of its large reserves, although this is undoubtedly a big factor, but because of its monopoly on the processing of REEs. As we noted earlier, rare earth elements are not rare, but it is rare to find them in pure form. The truly 'rare' part, therefore, is the infrastructure to process them. In 2023, China processed 87% of REEs (in comparison, the EU processed 2%) and refined 91%. 94% of rare earth magnets are made in China.[10] Processing, storage, and transport are too expensive to compete with China. China's domination of processing extends beyond rare earths. China controls 65% of refined lithium and 80% of refined cobalt.[11]

Previously, rare earths production, including the entire processing chain, was dominated by the US. Between 1965 and 1995, the Mountain Pass mine in California supplied most of the world's rare earth materials. In 1995, the Chinese company Zhong Ke San Huan acquired Magnequench, the US company that controlled all of the processing, and five years later transferred its Indiana production facilities to Tianjin, east of Beijing. After a toxic waste spill, Mountain Pass was closed in 2002 and wasn't reopened due to competition from Chinese suppliers. As the US withdrew from rare earths production, China's output rose from 80,000 tonnes in 2002 to 120,000 tonnes in 2006. This excludes clandestine production thought to account for 20 to 40% of the total. As a comparison, the US ceased production in 2003 and other countries did not exceed 1,000 tonnes a year.[12]

The Rush to Catch Up

Since then, China's competitors have tried to catch up — or catch back up. This is proving difficult. Non-Chinese production of REOs increased by nearly four times to 90,000 tonnes from 2015 to 2022. But meanwhile in China production of rare earths has doubled from 105,000 tonnes to 210,000 tonnes in 2022. China is seeking to thwart its competition and keep its monopoly by securing rare earth deposits outside its borders and protecting the intellectual property around processing and refinement.[13] Moreover, China's reserves, though estimated at 44 million tonnes, are ultimately finite. The rise in global demand for rare earths is also pushing China to find deposits beyond its borders. Indeed, since the early 2010s, the Chinese state has tried to keep official production between 100,000 and 120,000 tonnes per year and to consolidate the industry, until then very fragmented, around major enterprises with the aim of reducing clandestine extraction.

As a result, China became a net importer of unrefined rare earths in 2018. The raw or little-refined ores come from Myanmar,

Vietnam, Africa, and Australia — the latter via Malaysia where Australian rare earth companies such as the Lynas Corporation have set up refining operations. Malaysia itself produces 8% of rare earths worldwide as of 2024. Malaysia seems to understand the importance of processing and refining over mere extraction and said in 2023 that it would explore a ban on exports of rare earths to develop refining within the country. China has worked with several African governments to secure rare earths, among other strategic commodities, in a context where French and American presence on the continent is receding.[14]

The US is hoping to wane its dependency on China by securing minerals from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). In turn, the DRC hopes to gain US military assistance amidst its war with the Rwanda-backed M23. Among other critical minerals, the DRC has monazite (rich in light REEs) and euxenite (which contains many REEs). However, this does not get around the issue for the US that the minerals will need to be shipped to China for processing. And while the US is getting minerals for security, China is also securing minerals in the DRC in exchange for building infrastructure. China has been operating in the region for decades, pouring investment into mines and infrastructure. The DRC could very well become a hotly contested zone for the two imperialist powers. However, American investors and companies are unlikely to commit significant capital in the DRC without relative peace. This explains why Trump is trying to broker a ceasefire deal between the DRC and Rwanda, and why for the time being potential US-DRC partnership does not bother China much.[15]

In late February, Russia offered the US development of its critical mineral deposits, as opposed to Ukrainian ones. But the US does not have the technology to do so. China, however, does, and intends to secure Russia's rare earth deposits.[16] In order to secure new imports, the Chinese giant Shenghe Resources Holding signed a contract in 2015 for REOs with Tantalus Rare Earths, a German mining company operating in Madagascar. And in 2016 Shenghe became the major shareholder in the Australian company Greenland Minerals (now Energy Transition Minerals), signing an agreement to secure the entire output of REOs from Greenland's Kvanefjeld mine (the Chinese state being Shenghe's largest shareholder). However, in 2021 Greenland halted this project, no doubt due to US pressure.[17]

The US is not alone in making things difficult for China. Myanmar's share of global rare earth production rose from 0.2% to 14% from 2015 to 2023. China obtains about 40% of its rare earths from Kachin State, in Northern Myanmar. But in October 2024, the Kachin Independence Army took control of the region's mining operation, halting shipments of inputs needed for rare earth mining and the export of the minerals back to China.[18]

As for Australia, it supplies 3% of the world's rare earth mining production as of 2024. Lynas owns Australia's Mount Weld mine and has been supported by the Japanese government since 2010. That year, after the Japanese navy intercepted a Chinese trawler off the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, China halted shipments of rare earths to Japan, though without acknowledging this publicly. That year, China reduced its export quotas to 30,000 tonnes per year. Since 2005, China has put in place export quotas on rare earths. This incident spurred China's competitors to reduce their dependency on China. On top of this incident, as previously explained, China had reserved rare earths mining to Chinese companies, which violates WTO regulations (China joined the WTO in 2001). The US, along with the EU

and Japan, brought the case to the WTO, which ruled against China in 2014, resulting in a lift on export quotas in 2015, but by then China had already established its advantage. American and Japanese processing companies had set up operations in China to avoid shortages and having to pay higher prices, and had formed partnerships with Chinese companies, including in highly specialised activities such as magnet production. This resulted in a technology transfer to Chinese companies.

In 2023, China implemented curbs on shipments of germanium and gallium (neither of which are rare earths but are still strategic resources), which are needed for chips and military communications. In December 2024, China announced it was also restricting exports of non-rare earth strategic metals such as antimony (used in car batteries, solar panels, smartphones, nuclear weapons, armour-piercing ammunition, infrared sensors, night-vision goggles, and precision optics) in response to growing US trade restrictions and tariffs on Chinese products such as semiconductors. "*The US, in contrast, has not mined any marketable antimony since 1997*".[19] In February 2025, China also announced restrictions on exports of tungsten, indium, bismuth, tellurium, and molybdenum (none of them rare earths), used for military and green energy applications.[20] However, by restricting exports, and thus world supply, China risks favouring its competitors in the long-term since the rise in world prices could make it more viable to open new mines elsewhere. Such a rise in the price of these raw materials, a part of constant capital, means a fall in the general rate of profit. Hence the intensified hunt for these raw materials throughout the world.

However, this is where the distinction between REEs and other strategic minerals is critical. Because while China may be restricting exports of strategic resources, China has also been ramping up its rare earths production. In 2020, China did not cut its rare earths production quotas but increased them by 10%. In 2024, China's rare earth exports increased by 6%, resulting in falling prices.[21] China was apparently selling below cost.[22]

> *We must finally note a lowering of prices and selling at a loss to stifle the competitor. The trust here declares that "it does not wish to make profit on the enterprise itself, that the struggle is conducted only to defeat the competitor, and therefore without any relation to self-cost. The lower limit is formed, not by the production costs, but by the cartel's capital power and by the strength of its credit; the question thus reduces itself to how long its members will be able to stand a struggle which, for the time being, offers them no gain." In the home market this method is used to stamp out the final resistance of the opponent; in the foreign market it appears only as an increase of dumping.*[23]

By increasing supply, China lowered prices, with the aim of forestalling the US' new extraction projects. However, in April Trump's new volley of tariffs made China switch tactics from dumping to restricting exports of seven medium and heavy rare earths (samarium, gadolinium, terbium, dysprosium, lutetium, scandium, and yttrium) and magnets.[24] Contrary to Japanese companies, who were hurt in the aforementioned 2010 event, American companies do not typically stockpile rare earths, wishing to free their capital up for other endeavours, meaning they have been impacted more severely. Rare earth magnets make up a tiny share of China's overall exports to the US and elsewhere, so halting shipments causes less damage to China

than to the US.[25] China has, however, been damaged by the steady expansion of export controls by successive American presidents aimed at restricting access to cutting-edge technologies that might benefit China's military. Meanwhile, China has been using its industrial capacity to remove its dependency on foreign industrial goods necessary to modern manufacturing. While it remains far from catching up when it comes to certain goods like semiconductors, it is making rapid progress with products like carbon fibre and ball bearings.[26]

Indeed, in the economic war between China and the US, China has the advantage. After all, not only does the US depend on China for rare earths, China has a larger workforce, and is the world's workshop, with its production exceeding that of the next nine manufacturers combined.[27] Globalisation saw Western industries relocate, notably to China. While this was initially profitable for Western manufacturing, it also means China now has a higher organic composition of capital than Western countries. China overtook the US in number of patents in 2019, a sign of bridging the technological gap. Another sign of changing tides is that while Russia continues to export its natural resources in exchange for technological imports, as it did in its Tsarist and Soviet eras, these imports no longer primarily come from Western countries but from China. Just as the UK ceded its throne in the imperialist pecking order to the US, it may be the US' turn to make way for China. But this is unlikely to happen without a major war.

Western trade restrictions imposed to defend against China's rise and prepare rearmament, and Chinese retaliation, will slow turnover, restrict the market, see fixed costs defrayed across less output, and increase the price of imports of constant capital, raising the organic composition of capital. China for its part is not an indomitable force. After 2008 China used the rent from its nationalised lands to fund its infrastructure, creating a construction boom, raising productivity — most notably raising rural productivity, transforming farmers into wage labourers. A large part of its growth still relies on this transfer of labour-power from countryside to town, from agriculture to industry. The eventual exhaustion of this reserve of labour-power will increase labour costs and China's continued investment in productivity-raising capital will also increase the organic composition of capital. The combination of these factors will further plunge the world into crisis and war.

To reduce its dependency on China, the US reopened the Mountain Pass mine in 2018, which is currently the only rare earth mining and processing facility in the country. The US still has to export its ore to China for refining and processing, after which it is re-exported as magnets to the US and other countries, though in 2024 the US restricted its rare earth exports to China as part of the trade war. The owners of the mine recommissioned a separation plant in 2023, which would give the US the ability to process rare earths on home soil. As of 2024, the US produces 11% of rare earths worldwide.

The US is looking to expand its reserves of rare earths and critical minerals in general, with Trump even signing an executive order in April boosting the deep-sea mining industry (the order uses the term 'rare earths' to mean 'critical minerals'). The goal is to acquire polymetallic nodules, which can contain REEs.[28] The US' desire to expand its sources of rare earths can also be seen in its desire to acquire Greenland, its deal with the DRC, and its strong-arming Ukraine into giving up mining rights, and notably rare earth mining, despite the fact that Ukraine has no operational rare earth mines.[29] In fact, while Ukraine has substantial reserves

or deposits of lithium, graphite, manganese, titanium, gallium, and nickel, half of its rare earth deposits are currently under Russian control and there are doubts about how viable it would be to extract and process the rest.[30] Regardless, the deal is about more than rare earths. The EU is also interested in Ukraine's resources, and the EU leaders' current indignation at Trump is truthfully indignation that they might not get their share of the spoils.

The EU is currently considering stockpiling resources such as rare earths and permanent magnets in preparation for war.[31] Within the EU itself, a huge deposit of rare earths was discovered in Sweden in 2023.[32] The site also currently houses the largest underground iron ore mine in the world. But this deposit would still not be enough. And would not circumvent the fact that the EU is dependent on China for processing. The EU currently only has one facility for separating rare earths for magnet production, located in Estonia and operated by Canada's Neo Performance Materials. Belgian chemicals group Solvay is planning to expand its site in La Rochelle, France, to do the same. In a similar story to the American one above, the refinery at La Rochelle (then owned by Rhône-Poulenc) was once responsible for 50% of REE purification in the 1980s. Its rare earth activities were delocalised to China, with pollution being cited as the justification. According to the European Commission, in 2021, 98% of the rare earths used in the EU were imported from China. 100% of the EU's heavy rare earth elements supply comes from China. The EU has recently unveiled plans to cut its dependence on China but it remains to be seen if it can make a dent in that figure.[33] This means that for now the EU's push for green energy depends on China.

Rare Earth Elements and the Environment

In 2023, the EU produced 58% of wind turbines and 23% of electric vehicles. But while the EU may be leading the world in wind turbine production, this depends on rare earth elements from China such as praseodymium, neodymium, and dysprosium. The EU has pushed for recycling REEs but this is difficult as they are often glued to other components within complex products such as smartphones. As of 2023, REE recycling only satisfies 1% of EU demand. By contrast, 55% of EU copper demand is satisfied by recycling. This means that the push for renewable energy in the EU and elsewhere depends on the mining of REEs in China, at the expense of both the environment and workers' health.

Rare earths extraction in Inner Mongolia, where most rare earths extraction takes place in China, has resulted in lakes of toxic effluent, cases of sulphuric acid poisoning, and 'cancer villages'. Contamination of waters and soil has resulted in infertility and malformations. There has been some local mobilisation against the pollution, for example in Guangxi (the other region of China where large amounts of rare earths extraction takes place), but these have had little success. China paused the mining of heavy rare earths near Longnan (Southeast China) a few years ago because of the severe pollution it caused. However, in April there were indications that some of the mining operations in Longnan have resumed. As we stated in 2020:

> *Many of the solutions favoured by the Green lobby involve environmental destruction and pollution themselves. Mining large quantities of rare earth metals, cobalt and lithium, required for green energy, cause appalling pollution.*

China, where 70% of rare earths are mined, has poisoned vast areas of land. Mining lithium, for car batteries, in the Atacama desert in Chile has already destroyed salt water lakes and robbed the freshwater aquifer. The fact that capitalism requires continual growth and each nation state is in competition to gain a competitive advantage over its rivals means the environment must always remain an "externality." What capitalists can never admit is that the cause of the entire suite of environmental problems is global capitalism itself. Hence all solutions which leave capitalism in place are futile.[34]

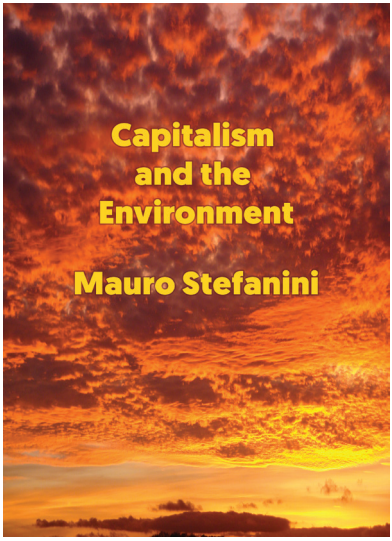
The race for renewable energy is just another reason for the scramble for these precious metals. As imperialist competition shifts from mainly trade and economic one-upmanship to military preparations, the quest to secure control of rare earths is becoming a key part of the game. From China, to Serbia, to Greenland, to Africa, and an increasing number of exploitable areas, local inhabitants have no say and often no idea why the land they live on is suddenly full of surveyors searching for profitable reserves. Meanwhile, for the workers of the world there are no profits to be had: only the sharpening evidence that unless they themselves engage in a collective fight for a new world community which takes account of the natural world then capitalism will ensure most of us have no future.

Erwan

Notes

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Capitalism and the Environment
Mauro Stefanini

Our late comrade Mauro Stefanini was one of the first to recognise the dangers of global warming and all the more immediate consequences of the environmental devastation created by modern capitalism. He eventually put these into articles published originally in 1994. We have translated and reprinted them here in a new edition which also includes a list of our main publications on this issue up to 2021.

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Adventures in the Culture Wars: A Review Article

Ash Sarkar, a contributing editor at Novara Media, has this year published her first book, *Minority Rule*, with the provocative subheading "Adventures in the Culture Wars". Novara Media was founded in 2011 and rose to prominence in the wake of the student movement as an outlet for news and political analysis with an autonomist slant.[1] However, their profile rose considerably during Jeremy Corbyn's tenure as leader of the Labour Party (2015-2020) as they threw themselves enthusiastically behind his leadership and became some of his most vocal supporters. Since Corbyn's resignation from the role five years ago, Sarkar and her Novara colleagues have resumed a more critical stance on the party, but have never really recovered politically from their opportunist years. Sarkar describes her politics as "libertarian communist" and her analytical framework as "Marxist", and is perhaps best known for her irritated outburst on *Good Morning Britain* in which she declared herself a "communist" and Piers Morgan an idiot.[2] In *Minority Rule,* Sarkar analyses the role of the media over the past few decades in manufacturing and channelling popular outrage, to pit us all against each other and distract us from the real issues at hand. Inevitably, the politics of identity – in both their left and right wing incarnations – play a key role in this history, and this forms a central theme in Sarkar's investigation.

Identity Politics of the Left

Sarkar's starting point is a critique of "the left", which she argues has distorted what she presents as the revolutionary essence of identity politics into a liberal aberration, resulting in a counter-productive, individualist turn in recent years. Sarkar recalls various experiences in the leftist milieu where attempts at organising were derailed by "oppression olympics", and presents a general trend that the obsession with personal experience and victimhood have played an actively destructive role in collective projects; this she contrasts with groups like the Combahee River Collective (CRC) and the Black Panther Party (BPP).[3] Returning to the CRC statement (written in 1974, published in 1977) which coined the term "identity politics", Sarkar argues that their original intention was collective, socialist, and revolutionary. Comparing this to the identity politics of the left today, Sarkar draws out three key noxious ideas prevalent in the latter: the primacy of "lived experiences", the insistence on "irreducible difference", and the undisputed assumption of "competing interests" (p.32). The ideas that our interests are at odds with each other on the basis of our various identity categories, and that our differences matter more than that which we have in common as workers, are indeed destructive to solidarity, and Sarkar is obviously quite right to point this out. What's more, as Sarkar notes, the favouring of "lived experience" as pre-eminent has led to the creation of "social capital out of suffering", creating "a perverse incentive to hold onto our victimhood, rather than change the conditions that created it" (p.65).

However, Sarkar's claim that these tendencies represent a deviation from what she considers to be the revolutionary kernel of identity politics is on far shakier ground. In the case of the CRC, that this was their intention may be true enough, as they write about the necessity of "the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy".[4] They

"often [found] it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression" because for black women at the time, these were "most often experienced simultaneously". Hence they draw on the "political contribution[s]" of the feminist and anti-racist movements, maybe most significantly the idea that "the personal is political". As assertions of the primacy of individual experience go, this is pretty unambiguous; they "spent a great deal of energy delving into the cultural and experiential nature of our oppression" and thus these experiences became the main basis of their politics. What's more, somewhat bafflingly for a self-described "Marxist", Sarkar allows the CRC's claim that Marx and Engels' writing "conceive[d] of the working class as 'merely raceless, sexless workers'" to go unchallenged. The need to address the particular ways in which certain sections of the working class are oppressed is paramount, and obvious enough; indeed, Marx and Engels themselves recognised this in their own analysis, as they repeatedly indicated the specific ways in which women or migrants were exploited in their time, and the dynamics of this within the wider working class.[5]

And within Marxism, we find theoretical tools far more apt to the task of opposing these oppressions than the fairly basic idea of "simultaneity"; we understand that these oppressions are not just coincident with one another, but products of the same historic process: the development of class society. Sarkar addresses this to a certain extent later on but only with respect to the concept of race, which she describes as a "technology" developed for the express purpose of justifying slavery and colonialism, and later perpetuated for the purpose of dividing the working class (p.237).

Furthermore, as we've seen over the past century or so, assimilation of minority groups has become as key a tool as marginalisation in the ruling class' survival kit. Though the experience of marginalisation can push someone to adopt revolutionary perspectives, by itself there is nothing inherently revolutionary in being of a minority identity. So today, it is quite possible to be, for example, both a black lesbian and a CEO. It is for this reason that the argument from identity leads naturally to reformist dead-ends (single issue campaigns, demands for representation, etc.); and it is for this reason that any attempt to rescue "identity politics" from reformism is fundamentally misguided. The individualist, reformist, essentially the bourgeois, development of identity politics is then no aberration from the essence of identity politics, but its logical conclusion. And it is for these reasons that the basis for addressing the specific oppression and exploitation to which various sections of the working class are subjected can only be that of independent working class politics; not some pluralist, opportunist concession to cross-class and sectional politics whose aim is assimilation and reform.

Imperialism

Given this inherent tendency towards reformism, it is inevitable that the logical endpoint for identity politics should be its adoption by the capitalist class to legitimise its rule, and although (as we will soon see) Sarkar's analysis of why this happens falls short, she is right to point out the capitalist hypocrisy here. She refers to the examples of Coca Cola and the CIA, among others, embracing intersectionality in their training and marketing, and points out the irony of Coca Cola acknowledging the ongoing lack of clean water in Flint, Michigan while profiting from the same problem in Chiapas, Mexico; of the CIA advertising itself as anti-discriminatory while the US and its client states drop bombs indiscriminately on their

geopolitical opponents. This problem Sarkar names imperialism, and she is not wrong to do so.

However, Sarkar's, or at least this book's, understanding of "imperialism" reads as limited to the imperialist policy of the UK and US and their allies. Imperialism though is not just the policy of one state or bloc of states; it is the phase of the world capitalist system within which all states have had to operate for over a century now, and the inexorable motive force of all foreign policy of states on all sides. It would be foolish and not a little patronising to presume that Sarkar, a veteran of the left since the student movement and self-described Marxist, is unaware of the methodology elaborated by Marx and Engels, and later developed into the theory of imperialism by Bukharin and Lenin.[6] But this makes their omission from Minority Rule's criticism of imperialism all the more frustrating, because it would explain far more satisfactorily a lot of the problems she identifies.

For example, the current tendency wherein the means of production and distribution are being concentrated and centralised in the hands of fewer and fewer, bigger and bigger organisations (like Amazon, Google, Meta and so on) is described as a "feudalistic turn" (à la Varoufakis) towards "[not] privatisation [but] enclosure" (pp.258-60). But this tendency towards monopoly ownership with increasing financialisation, speculation, and involvement of the state are not obscure to Marxists; it is exactly what has defined capitalist's imperialist epoch for more than a century. It bears insisting upon not for the sake of dogmatism, but because it is crucial to our understanding of how the forces that immiserate and oppress the working class are the selfsame forces propelling the global drive to war. This more complete definition of "imperialism" reveals those economic developments to be not a regression in terms of the mode of production, but a step forward, further into the abyss to which this system condemns us.

Identity Politics of the Right

But criticism of "the left" is not where Minority Rule ends – nor indeed is it what makes up most of the book. Instead, having dealt with the inadequacy of the left's response to the media's culture wars, Sarkar then traces the issue back to how the right wing of capital concocts them in the first place through both "legacy media" and social media. From here she segues into an examination of the illusions and fallacies underlying various right wing talking points and why they have gained so much traction among the general populace. Contrary to the way it has been marketed (something over which Sarkar's control is obviously limited), this actually takes up most of the body of Minority Rule, and, without the first chapter, would have much broader relevance in its analysis and message (though the language and humour of social media 'discourse' Sarkar frequently adopts can be off-putting). Besides the odd diversity and inclusiveness training, broadened to many workplaces and with increasingly perplexing content, most working class people do not come into anywhere near as much contact with the debates around intersectionality as with the right wing talking points that, as Sarkar shows competently, flood our consciousness on a continual basis.

Sarkar's second central thesis then amounts to this: the culture wars are a product of the media, orchestrated by the capitalist class, and in particular its right wing, to channel our discontent down blind alleys and convince us that the problem is each other, not them and their system. As she has put it in various promo clips and interviews, we are being ruled by an elite minority

– just not the one we've been told about. Sarkar sketches out the experience of the working class in the UK over the past forty years or so – the defeat of the wave of class struggle, the dismantling of British heavy industry and the welfare state, the gradual shift towards small-scale ownership of property and businesses, etc. – and charts how capitalists, but particularly the right wing of capital and its media (in power as they have been for the majority of this time, though here she understates the role that capital's left wing has played) have orchestrated this process to suit their economic and political interests. This has resulted in an exponentially fractured working class resentful and suspicious of each other.

As Sarkar shows, by systematically undermining the working class' solidarity amongst itself, the capitalist class have sown the seeds of distraction which they now reap in abundance in the form of culture wars between the identity politics of the right and the left. To illustrate this, Sarkar takes us on a whistlestop tour of recent moral panics on issues such as migration and gender identity. She also lays bare the mainstream media's shift wherein British working class people, once derided and dismissed as "chavs", now make up the "white working class" to be defended from made-up threats (migrants, trans people, etc.). Having drawn back the curtain to expose the charlatans pulling furiously at the multiplex levers of their illusion machine, Sarkar rightly emphasises that it is the working class as a whole, on both sides of the invented divides of these moral panics, who are worse off for being divided against each other. Attacks on pay and conditions introduced against migrant workers first are then spread to encompass white British workers too; attacks on healthcare dressed up as combatting "gender ideology" inevitably impact healthcare for cis and trans people alike.

Sarkar also notes how new technological developments in social media have been instrumental in this process in recent years in the way that they have monopolised our attention and thoughts to an unprecedented degree. Since Marx and Engels noted that, "the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas", the nature of the capitalist class' enduring dominance over our very thoughts has evolved significantly. In Marx and Engels' day, this dominance was attributable in no small part to the fact that basic literacy among the poor and working class was a relatively recent phenomenon, and any education above that was the more or less exclusive preserve of the wealthy. In the 180 intervening years, literacy rates have risen across the globe, and mass media has proliferated, first in the form of syndicated journalism, then in the form of social media. The latter, Sarkar writes, has "partially, but dramatically, democratised the public sphere", and the effects of this have been "both wondrous and deeply depressing" (p.83). Yet the fact that this "democratisation" has occurred within the framework of capitalism is crucial, because like with any capitalist "democratisation", the promise of equal participation in the social sphere is at odds with the reality of how the interests of capital are constantly manipulating the weight of various participants' influence.

Capitalist Crisis

Again, though, the nature of the crisis inherent to capitalism's functioning is missing from Sarkar's explanation, and it means we are largely left with the impression that these policies and tactics find their origins in the ill will of successive right wing and centrist governments. But again, this is consistent with the laws of motion of capitalism: as profit rates decline, the capitalist class must come up with ways to offset this

tendency while shifting as much of the cost onto the working class as possible, in both economic and consequently social terms. Periodic economic crises involving unemployment, impoverishment and misery for the working class are an inevitable part of capitalism's existence. In capitalism's imperialist phase the wholesale destruction of capital infrastructure required to kickstart new cycles of accumulation has ultimately demanded war: world war. Today we are living at the tail-end of capitalism's third global accumulation cycle. Hence heavy industry has been dismantled in capitalist centres and shifted abroad to its peripheries where wage-labour is cheaper (and organic composition of capital lower); hence the downward pressure on wages relative to inflation everywhere; hence the scaling back of social support for working class people at the same time that wages contract and jobs disappear. That is not to say that those governments' policies and tactics have had no hand to play, but that they have been an expression of capitalist crisis rather than its cause. Just once, in the introduction, does Sarkar acknowledge that capitalism tends towards crisis at all, where she describes this tendency as "an insatiable need for new markets" (p.7). But this need for new markets, certainly a feature of capitalism's in-built crisis, is not its core motive force. As Marx and Engels identified, most notably in the third volume of Capital, this motive force is the tendential fall in the rate of profit, of which capital's never-ending search for "new markets" is a symptom, not a synonym. If this sounds pedantic, its consequences are significant for our understanding of how the capitalist system functions, and what the remedy for this crisis is.

For example, Sarkar rightly identifies the nostalgia for the period following the Second World War, the hey-day of British Social Democracy, as a pernicious illusion. But elsewhere she describes the problem of "class inequalities between rich and poor" as "quite straightforward to solve" – and then rattles off a list of suggestions with no perceptible distinction from the Keynesianism that defined that era ("if you're willing to tax wealth, fund welfare and public services, squeeze profits and drive up wages", p.198). Little more than a throwaway comment, it is nevertheless a telling moment, not because this is what Sarkar means by "communism" (we assume it is not), but because it betrays a cart-before-horse misconception of how and why any kind of concessionary reforms are introduced, and indeed how and why the left wing parties that promise them are selected to govern, in the first place.

The failure of Corbynism casts a long shadow for this reason, and although her criticism of Starmer's Labour government and Blair's before it is fairly uncompromising, Sarkar's analysis of the Corbyn movement's demise is largely limited to errors of strategy and insurmountable opposition by the rest of the political spectrum. And although Sarkar all but admits that she and her Novara colleagues pursued a fundamentally opportunist strategy during these years, her evaluation of this period is limited to the fact that it was naïve and ultimately unsuccessful. But then, it would seem equally naïve on our part to expect any honest reckoning from Sarkar and Novara with the role they have played and continue to play in reinforcing confusions and illusions in the capitalist left.

It is hardly surprising then that Minority Rule is no break from leftism; that is, from reformism. For all Sarkar has described herself at various times throughout the book (and her career) as a "communist", she scarcely offers any specific idea of what this means or could be done about the real problems she has identified. And while in Minority Rule Sarkar does seem to attempt to pose the problem as one of the capitalist

system as such, the actual political content of her arguments lead inevitably back down the blind alley of reform. The importance of struggles to improve the conditions of our life is not nil. The defence and improvement of our living conditions is of course important; it is through these struggles that the working class must relearn and rediscover its collective power, to understand and express its common interest as a class by defending itself against capitalist attacks, and eventually move from the defensive to the offensive. But it is an error to see these struggles as ends in and of themselves, when, as history from distant to recent has shown, the capitalist class will revoke these reforms as easily as they grant them, as their interests dictate. Today their interests more and more clearly indicate that arms spending is to take priority over wages and welfare. It is in these experiences of struggle that the working class comes to understand its position in capitalist society, and the historic mission that this unique position affords it; namely, that of the gravediggers of the capitalist system itself.

With the context of those aforementioned illusions in the left wing of capital, it is understandable that Sarkar would complain that politics has "*become a spectator sport*" (p.12). But the fact is, all "democracy" within the scope of the capitalist system is no more nor less than "*democracy for the minority, only for the propertied classes, only for the rich*", as Lenin aptly put it in The State and Revolution, and involves the working class delegating away our power to people, and to bodies, which claim to represent us, but which in fact work in the interests of that class which exploits us, the capitalist class. So if we are to speak positively of "democracy", we must be explicit and precise about proletarian democracy, which has nothing in common with the bourgeois pantomime. We must mean the working class exercising power actively and directly through its own independent organs of class rule, historically discovered within the experience of self-organised mass class struggle – mass assemblies, strike committees, and ultimately workers' councils (or soviets).

As a brief history of manufactured outrage in modern media, the kernel of Minority Rule contains little to disagree with. This stands too for her argument that the solution is not to wade into the culture war to try to beat the right at their own game, but to reject their talking points and set our own agenda based on our common interests, and to combat division not with more division but with solidarity. Unfortunately, its merits are inextricable from its weaknesses because the whole point of the book is the politics and strategy of "the left". As communists, we are not part of the "left", but rather part of the working class; more specifically, we are part of that minority of the class which has come to understand the need for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society and the class which rules it, and the construction of a new society free of classes, states and money in its stead. This society we call communism, and it has nothing in common with the state capitalist monstrosities of the USSR, China, nor any other nation state that has built up its edifice on the blood and sweat of the working class in the name of our liberation. This society, brought about by revolutionary means, must ultimately encompass the whole world or else it is doomed to fail. And so this revolution must be led by the working class, organised by our own self-initiative and on our own independent terrain, united across the arbitrary lines of difference drawn by our exploiters – race, gender, sexuality, religion and every other one they come up with – to pit us against each other.

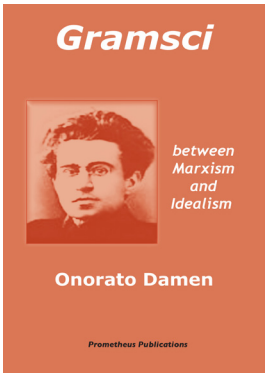
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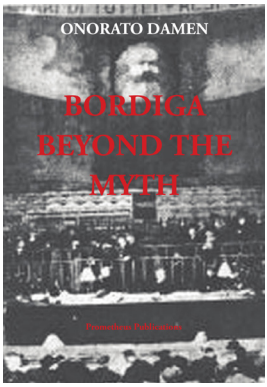
1. The name Novara comes from the Italian city in the Piedmont region, the setting of the 1971 film The Working Class Goes to Heaven, directed by Elio Petri.
2. Though we may disagree on the meaning of "communism", we concur with the latter claim.
3. A similar argument was put forward by Asad Haider in his 2018 book Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump, which we reviewed at the time, criticising the legacy of Stalinism that hangs over the CRC and BPP. https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2018-10-26/mistaken-identity-review
4. The CRC statement is available here: https://americanstudies.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/Keyword%20Coalition_Readings.pdf
5. See for example the comments on black slavery and Irish migrants in Marx's Capital and Engels' The Conditions of the Working Class in England. For an analysis of the historical roots of women's oppression, see Engels' The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.
6. See Bukharin's Imperialism and World Economy and Lenin's Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism.

Gramsci between Marxism and Idealism £7.50

Antonio Gramsci was to become the tool of the Comintern in manoeuvring the Communist Party of Italy out of of the hands of the revolutionaries who had founded it. His tragic death in Fascist custody has made him a martyr to many of the reformist left. Damen's considerations on Gramsci's shortcomings as an analytical and practical Marxist are an antidote to that. This volume also contains the Platform of the Committee of Intesa (Alliance) of 1925 which Gramsci had condemned.



Bordiga Beyond the Myth £5



Amadeo Bordiga led the fight to form the Communist Party of Italy as a "section of the Third International" in 1921. No sooner was this achieved than he found himself leading the fight of the Communist Left in Italy against the same International's abandonment of revolutionary politics. Arrested and imprisoned whilst awaiting trial in 1923, Bordiga opted to stand aside from the party's leadership in Italy allowing free reign for Comintern manoeuvres to introduce a 'centrist' leadership under Gramsci. Even so, as Fascism took hold the Communist Left —in both exile and fascist gaols— did not disappear. Bordiga however did. He retreated from political activity for almost 2 decades. The significance of this volume is that it demonstrates that the "Italian Left" was not just Bordiga but a living movement that has responded to the reality of the class war throughout its history.

"End Times" – Can Capitalism be Saved?

Peter Turchin's book *End Times*[1] is another bourgeois academic's attempt at understanding history and the trajectory of capitalist society. His method of analysis, though initially ridiculed, has attracted some interest and respect after he predicted in 2010, via his multipath forecasting (MPF) model, that the 2020s would be a period of sharp instability for the US. This prediction was made in the scientific journal *Nature* and the storming of the Capitol by Trump's supporters a decade after the prediction brought a measure of recognition to Turchin's approach. The book is largely about the US but attempts to apply the method of analysis to a broad sweep of history going back to feudal and slave societies. It is an indication of how worried the capitalist class is over the direction in which the capitalist system is heading. Like Piketty's analysis of inequality in his tome *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*[2] published in 2014, this analysis concludes the ship of capital is heading for the rocks. Turchin, like Piketty, is trying to offer capitalism ways of avoiding the civil wars or revolution which their analyses predict. Turchin writes:

> *Social breakdown and internal warfare kill people, wreck economies and roll back human achievement. We must develop a clear-eyed understanding of why it happens so that we can avoid the endless cycle of recurrent waves of instability and violence.*[3]

However, both Turchin and Piketty's works are empirical and so lack any theoretical understanding of the fundamental economic motive forces driving the capitalist system, or those driving earlier societies such as feudalism or slave society. These are the forces which compel the ruling classes to immiserate the subject class – hence the proposed remedies of Turchin and Piketty are little more than wishful thinking. Turchin identifies the solution to the catastrophic trajectory on which he sees the system heading as being a massive tax on the richest 10% of the population, and the stripping of the wealth of many members of this group. This was what, he argues, occurred during the 1929 slump and the New Deal from 1933 in the US. Turchin thinks these measures saved the day for capitalism. The wealth, which is stripped from this elite 10%, should, he recommends, be distributed to the immiserated half of the population, though this is not exactly what happened in the 1930s. Meanwhile, Piketty argues the natural operation of capitalism produces inequality and there is no way the normal operation of the system can prevent this. The system was, in his view, saved by the two world wars of the last century which massively reduced the wealth of the richest groups and reduced inequality. This forced interruption of capitalism's structural tendencies allowed capitalism to start again from a more egalitarian position in 1945. However, continues Piketty, the internal laws of capitalism reasserted themselves in the post war period and the situation is such that by 2030 the US poorest 50% will receive only 15% of the social product. This is likely to lead to revolt. To remedy this, Piketty recommends a wealth tax on the accumulated wealth of the top 10%, rather than an income tax. The proceeds, he argues, should be distributed to the poorest 50%. In other words, both Turchin and Piketty are demanding the state suspend the laws of capitalism to save

the system via an altruistic redistribution of wealth to the immiserated majority.

Empirical analyses can be used to support a theory or to derive patterns from which a theory is derived, as occurred in the natural sciences, but Turchin does neither. As Marx argued:

> *… all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided.*[4]

Turchin thinks the mass of historical facts can speak for themselves if properly analysed and social trends identified. However, unless we understand the economic forces creating these social trends and the mass of facts he assembles all we can conclude is that the future will resemble the past. However, history has progressed from slave society to feudalism and from feudalism to capitalism. This is not simply patterns repeating themselves. To understand this the underlying economic forces need to be identified and used to explain the social phenomena for which data is assembled. Turchin fails to identify any driving forces, in fact, he scorns such an approach. The data should, he thinks, speak for itself. His general conclusion is that all states have integrative and disintegrative cycles which typically occur over a period of 200 years (except in the case of societies where the ruling class is polygamous, where he reduces this period to 100 years because the ruling class breeds faster causing overproduction of elites). The identification of these periods is purely empirical and as we would expect there is no explanation for why these periods occur beyond the struggle between elites and immiserated sectors of society. The data again is left to speak for itself. If Turchin wished to identify fundamental economic forces causing these periods of integration and disintegration, the task would be compounded by the need to identify differing underlying economic forces for the different modes of production. Instead he tries to explain all societies through the framework of conflict between the elites and the immiserated.

What all the big data and mathematical models tell us is that there is recurrent struggle between different groups in all these societies, the elites and the immiserated. Turchin specifically denies that these groups are classes. He is aware of Marx's view, stated in the Communist Manifesto, that "*The history of hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle*".[5] But he argues that his elites and immiserated are not classes because "*These groups are not defined by their relations to the means of production.*"[6]

Of course, though they may be defined another way in Turchin's glossary, in reality these groups are fundamentally defined by their relations to the means of production and there is little point in Turchin trying to deny this. What his models produce is a class analysis of sorts and are, in fact, a confirmation of Marx's description of history as history of class struggle quoted above. In each mode of production there are specific forces driving the respective classes to confront each other. Turchin does not want to be bothered with identifying these forces, he does not describe these groups as social classes as he wants to apply the same method to feudal and slave societies, and instead thinks his mathematical models will tell us all we need to know. But how has Turchin constructed his models?

Turchin's Models

Turchin claims his work is an attempt to turn history into a science by assembling masses of data, creating the so-called "big data", and making sense of it by use of analytic mathematical models. He christens the new science of history "cliodynamics".

He is, however, aware that philosophers of science, like Karl Popper, had insisted that a science of history was impossible since human societies were too complex, but thinks that the enormous computing power available today can make sense of this complexity. Turchin was initially, he tells us, an ecologist who studied the dynamics of populations of beetles, butterflies, mice and deer. His success in understanding the expansion, collapse and recovery of these groups by means of collection of "big data" and computer modelling made him think the same general principles could be used in studying human societies, in particular state formation and state collapse.

Turchin assembles data from bourgeois statistics such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), wages, taxes, working population numbers, life expectancy, health, heights of population, protests, riots, opinion polls, historical data compiled by historians and other things he considers relevant. These are culled by his team of helpers and entered into a database to produce his "big data". This is then analysed mathematically.

Models' Predictions

The studies look at the relationship between the elites and the immiserated sections of societies; in the case of capitalist society, this broadly translates into the capitalist class with its agents and hangers on, and the working class. His models indicate that social breakdown or instability arises from overproduction of elites and immiseration of the working classes. Overproduction of elites arises when there are too many elite aspirants with degrees or other qualifications and insufficient positions in the ranks of the ruling class and its state. The immiseration of the lower orders of society such as the unskilled or manufacturing working class is a result of the actions of the ruling class via taxation, reduction in wages, reduction in benefits healthcare, etc. The ruling class sets up what Turchin calls a "wealth pump" which pumps wealth from the working class to the elites causing immiseration of the working class. The overproduction of elites produces a group of "counter-elites" who are bitter at their exclusion from the elites. Violence or social breakdown occurs when the counter-elites place themselves at the leadership of the immiserated masses and lead their resistance.

All this sounds more or less like a classic statement of the class struggle which we do not need mathematical models to predict. In fact, it is. The prediction that the models arrive at for the US is that the 2020s will be a decade of instability and violence and it is too late to prevent this.[7] He supports his predictions by unpicking some of the rosy statistics provided by the bourgeoisie.

He is not the first to point out that the averages of official statistics disguise the vast disparity in income but he gives some useful figures to demonstrate this. For example, a worker in the bottom 5th of the statistics earns approximately $20,000 annually while a CEO earns $13.6 million (both figures are in inflation adjusted dollars). This produces a median wage way above that of the bottom 40%. Also, the adjustment for inflation is highly problematic because items purchased by the bottom 40% are different from those of the top 20%. Another misleading statistic is household income. In the 40 years since 1976, annual household income has, according to US statistics, gone from $61,000 to $89,000; however, the average household now has more than one person earning. For example, the participation of women in the US workforce has risen from 30% in 1955 to 60% in 2000. A more useful statistic might be the median wage which in the 40 years went from $17.1 per hour to $18.9. Yet, US statistics divide the population into 5 groups

and if we look at median wage for the lower groups there is an actual fall. Workers with only high school degrees saw their average wages fall from $19.25 per hour to $18.57 per hour in the 40 years. Those without high school degrees saw a fall from $15.5 per hour to $13.66. In an attempt to get round the problem of inflation adjustment Turchin introduces what he calls a relative wage, that is wages in current dollars at the time of the statistic divided by GDP per capita again in dollars at the time of the statistic. He finds that between 1976 and 2016 relative wages of workers have decreased by 30%.[8] This statistic is a ratio which also does not tell the whole story. For example, in the 1930s, when the situation of the working class was catastrophic, Turchin finds the relative wage was increasing. Presumably this was because of the decline in numbers of the elites. While it is clear bourgeois statistics hide the real scale of immiseration of the working class, the relative wage does so also.

The immiseration of the lower orders of society and elite overproduction are combined in the mathematical model to produce what Turchin calls a political stress index (PSI), used for MPF, which keeps track of radicalisation and moderation processes. He finds that the 30% drop in relative wages mentioned above has not been seen since the three decades before the US Civil War, 1830 to 1860. This is part of the data input to his model which predicts the US is in a situation similar to that before the Civil War.

He is at pains to show that the US is a plutocracy. He points out that the US ruling class is a coalition of top wealth holders, the 1% and the top degree holders, the 10%. After 1980 the flood of wealth from the working classes to the economic elites ballooned. This was the "wealth pump" transferring wealth from the working classes to the elites. At the same time the corporate elite reduced their taxes thereby starving the Treasury and accumulating massive resources for themselves. Turchin predicts this is leading to

> *The fate of the Roman, Dutch and Habsburg Spanish empires.*[9]

Turchin's Solution to Avoid Social Collapse

Turchin's failure to analyse the fundamental economic relationships which underlie the dismal picture he paints means that the solutions he proposes are based on empiricism – he concludes that the future must be made to resemble the past by actions of the capitalist state. A Marxist understanding of the internal relations of capitalist production shows that elite overproduction and working class immiseration are symptoms, not the cause of the instability and violence Turchin predicts. There is overproduction of constant capital. Put simply, this means the mass of machinery and raw materials used in production increases in value faster than variable capital, by which is meant the value of the labour-power used in production. The increase in the ratio of constant capital to variable, in turn, leads to a tendency for the rate of profit to fall.[10] It is the fall in the rate of profit which forces our rulers to attempt to restore profitability by whatever means they can. It is this which is behind the attacks on working-class wages and conditions and restriction of the numbers of the elites. These things are therefore symptoms of the deeper problems of the internal workings of capitalism itself.

Turchin, however, wants the elites to change direction and reverse the "wealth pump." He urges them, like the proverbial leopard, to change their spots and change from predatory beasts into altruists. They should distribute a large section of their wealth to the lower 50%. As mentioned above, Turchin argues this is what was done

in the US New Deal in the 1930s and so should be done again.

Two problems arise with all this. The first is that it wasn't the New Deal which saved the day for capitalism; it was the devaluation and destruction of constant capital which occurred during the Second World War which saved the day for capitalism. The New Deal, which Turchin so admires, was the capitalist class's response to the depth of the crisis which started in 1929. This crisis was so severe the ruling class was faced with the prospect of introducing state capitalist measures to mitigate the catastrophic conditions of the working class or prepare for revolution. A few statistics illustrate this. Between 1929 and 1932 US national income halved, 15 million were unemployed, steel production - an indication of capitalist vigour - dropped to 12% of what it was in 1929, farm income dropped from $12bn to $5bn, $10 million of savings were wiped out as 5,000 banks collapsed. Millions were evicted from their homes, and lived in boxes and shacks made from tin cans on the fringes of the cities in the so-called "Hoovervilles". There was hunger in the cities and the countryside while, as is normal in capitalism, food was being dumped and poisoned to prevent the hungry from eating it. This was in order to keep prices up. The system was on the brink of collapse and the normal operation of capitalism was only making things worse. Roosevelt's New Deal was, as Turchin says, an attempt to use the state to save the system. Various state bodies were set up to attempt to counter unemployment with these agencies paying less than prevailing wages. They reduced unemployment but did not eliminate it. The work done by these bodies, such as the Civil Works Administration, was not productive and did not go into accumulation of productive capital. Hence, these organisations did not address the fundamental problems of capitalism. The passing in 1935 of the Social Security Act and the National Labour Relations Act, which allowed workers to organise in trade unions, created the impression that the New Deal was a concession to the workers. In fact, the rights given to workers to organise resulted in strikes being controlled by the unions, including the newly formed CIO[11], and thus less effective. Turchin's "wealth pump" was not reversed, it was stalled. All this did produce a brief recovery from 1935 to 1936 after which the recession returned with a vengeance. By the end of 1937 steel production, for instance, dropped from 80% of capacity to 19%. War production, which started in 1938, provided some relief for the unemployed but in 1939 there were still 10 million unemployed. Production of armaments, which has been described as military Keynesianism, still does not solve capitalism's problem of profitability since arms production is simply waste production. The products do not re-enter the production cycle as new constant capital, they are destined to be destroyed in war. In the war itself half of all US production became war production and accumulation of capital ceased. This brought a massive devaluation of capital, as constant capital was used up but not replaced. This devaluation of constant capital, together with reductions in wages and rationing during the war, laid the foundation for the increase of profit rates which underpinned the post-war recovery. The capitalist crisis was ended by the war, not by the New Deal. This means that Turchin's claim that the present crisis could be ended by another New Deal is just wrong.

The war restored profit rates for a period of about 30 years. The post-war boom ended in the 1970s, which is also when Turchin's findings show a decline in his relative wage measure. The return of the crisis of profitability meant the relative wage could no longer be easily increased by the capitalist class through concessions to wages and

conditions. Which brings us to the second problem, that the leopard cannot change its spots. The elites of capitalism are forced to attack and immiserate the proletariat because of the internal working of capitalism itself. The constant accumulation of capital in relation to labour tends to reduce profit rates. To counter this, the capitalist class tries to increase exploitation of the workforce by drives for efficiency. These entail the replacement of workers by machines, robots, computers and AI, or simply speed ups or longer working hours. However, since exploitation of living labour is the only source of surplus value which forms capitalism's profit, excluding workers from production ultimately reduces the amount of profit in each commodity produced with the reduced labour input, and so tends to make rates of profit fall further. It therefore makes the situation worse for capital. This is the driving force which Turchin thinks there is no need to understand, but which controls the fall in the relative wage which he discovers. The tendency for the rate of profit to fall became acute in the 1970s. The elites who control capitalism reacted by increasing the exploitation of the working class through lower wages and worsening working conditions and exporting capital to countries where labour-power is cheaper. However, the immiseration of the working class has its limits and these problems drive our rulers towards imperialist adventures. These involve eliminating competitors, gaining cheaper raw materials, gaining cheaper labour-power or control of strategic trade routes, all this by military force if other means fail. Leaders such as Trump are saying all this quite openly.

A period of violence and revolt, which Turchin predicts, may indeed be coming. Turchin thinks it is now too late to avoid it. Unless it leads to revolution and the overthrow of the capitalist system all the problems which we have described will continue. As it stands, the immanent forces behind capitalist competition are pushing each national section of the ruling class to become more violent, making generalised war an ever more real prospect. The conflicts raging today will then only appear as a prelude before the main act.

The real choice facing the immiserated working class today is either revolution or war.

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Notes

1. Peter Turchin "End times, Elites, Counter Elites and the path of Political Disintegration" published by Penguin Books 2024
2. See review of Piketty's "Capital in the twenty first century", https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2015-08-07/piketty-marx-and-capitalism%E2%80%99s-dynamics
3. Peter Turchin "End Times" p295
4. K Marx Capital Volume 3 ch. 48
5. Communist Manifesto section 1
6. Peter Turchin "End Times" p78
7. Peter Turchin "End Times" p202
8. Peter Turchin "End Times" p79
9. Peter Turchin "End Times" p206
10. See capitalisms economic foundations. https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-08-31/capitalism-s-economic-foundations-part-i
11. Congress of Industrial Organisations (CIO) formed in 1935 as a committee within the American Federation of Labour

Parliamentary Democracy and Fascism – the Two Faces of the Bourgeoisie
Two Speeches by Onorato Damen from 1925

When Onorato Damen rose to speak in the Italian Chamber of Deputies in March 1925 parliamentary democracy, such as it existed in the Kingdom of Italy, was in its dying days.[1] Three years earlier, Benito Mussolini had been installed as Prime Minister by King Victor Emmanuel after the "March on Rome", despite the Fascists having only 35 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.[2] This was a reward for Fascist violence against striking workers, and Socialist Party offices and members, which was being unleashed on the streets of Italy since the Biennio Rosso (the Two Red Years, 1919-20). However, it would take a few more years before the Fascists could complete the imposition of their dictatorship.

Mussolini had been compelled to manoeuvre warily amongst the institutions of the Italian monarchy, much to the chagrin of his more violent followers. However, it was an act of violence ordered by Mussolini himself that accelerated the process of establishing the dictatorship. This was the murder of the reformist socialist, Giacomo Matteotti.[3]

The April 1924 election in Italy was fought under the Acerbo Law (passed November 1923) which gave two thirds of the seats to the majority party provided it won 25% of the votes. It was happily agreed to by many of the Italian Liberal (we would say "conservative") Party which represented the bulk of the Italian capitalist class. In a wave of violent intimidation and posing as the National List (which included many former Liberal deputies) the Fascists won 60% of the vote and got 355 seats. The Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I) obtained 4 more seats to add to its 15 in the previous parliament. Amongst these were Onorato Damen and Antonio Gramsci (both recently returned to Italy[4] and enjoying, for now, immunity from arrest as Deputies in the Chamber).

In May 1924, when the new parliamentary session opened, Matteotti rose to denounce the blatant fraud and violence of the 1924 elections, calling for them to be annulled. He finished by predicting that the Fascists would kill him. And so they did. On his way to the Chamber of Deputies, a fortnight later he was kidnapped by Amerigo Dumini's Fascist thugs. His body was discovered with a file through his chest in August.[5]

The discovery of the body opened a period of acute crisis for Mussolini which lasted until January 1925. As we showed in our article on Matteotti's murder in Revolutionary Perspectives 24, Damen's view of the official response of the PCd'I to this crisis was scathing. Instead of taking the fight to the streets, at a time when strikes were taking place the length and breadth of Italy, the PCd'I, now headed by Gramsci, joined in the parliamentary games of the bourgeois parties. This was after all the era of the Communist International's "united front" although, in joining the so-called "Aventine Secession", Gramsci was not just cooperating with the various socialist parties, but went further in aligning with the diminishing band of Liberals who were not yet ready to cooperate with Fascism.[6] With the collapse of the "Aventine Secession", Gramsci's failure to put the PCd'I at the head of the class movement gave a momentarily-paralysed Mussolini even more breathing

space to survive through the crisis of 1924.

It was only on 3 January 1925 that Mussolini was forced to declare his hand. He announced that "if fascism was a criminal conspiracy" he "alone" was responsible for "all that has happened", meaning the previous Fascist violence (although he did not mention Matteotti).[7] He then challenged his opponents to indict him, knowing full well that, after the Biennio Rosso, most of the capitalist class, and all the institutions of their bourgeois state, were already prepared to accept Fascism as a movement which could tame the working class. The Fascist dictatorship could now begin in earnest. In the overwhelmingly Fascist Chamber of Deputies the voice of opposition would have found it difficult enough to make itself heard. However, even more courage was now required to oppose the Fascist regime, when thousands of squadristi ringed the Montecitorio Palace intimidating Deputies as they arrived. Damen's speeches were thus making use of one of the last tribunes from which to address the crimes that had happened, were happening and were about to happen.

The two extracts which follow are from the stenographic record of the sessions of the Italian Chamber of Deputies of 9 and 11 March 1925 and have been translated into English for the first time. Damen had been a member of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) which became the founding force of the PCd'I, "Section of the Third International", in 1921. In 1943, in the middle of the Second World War, he would become one of the main founders of the Internationalist Communist Party (PCInt) from which our Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT) takes its main inspiration today.

As can be seen from the transcripts, Damen's speeches were not received kindly by the Fascist majority. Not only was he interrupted repeatedly, but when, in the second speech, he denounced the Fascists' fraudulent claim to offer anything to the working class, their Deputies leapt from their seats and threateningly flooded the aisles of the Chamber.

However this was not the only challenge faced by Damen and his comrades, the original founders of the PCd'I. They were fighting not only against the Fascists, but also inside the PCd'I against the Comintern-imposed leadership of Gramsci and Palmiro Togliatti. The majority of the membership still supported the original leadership of the Party now designated as "the Left". Some of its members, including Damen, were at that very time in the process of forming a Committee of Intesa ("understanding" or "alliance") inside the Party, which rejected the opportunist and self-defeating tactic of the "united front".[8] This Committee was ordered to dissolve by the new Central Committee, and, to the dismay of the other members who regarded him as their leader, Bordiga accepted this Party discipline, just as he had accepted the Comintern's imposition of the Gramsci-Togliatti leadership in his place in 1923, despite still retaining a majority in the Party. And this was a Party which was still growing in support within the working class. It was these workers, whose strikes Damen had addressed in the streets,[9] that he was now aiming to reach from the tribune of the Chamber.

This internal struggle in the PCd'I gives added significance to the first speech which is a denunciation of the role played by German Social Democracy, and particularly Friedrich Ebert, in crushing the workers' movement in Germany which had brought about the end of the First World War with their revolt in November 1918. Ebert had been the personification of the counter-revolutionary nature of the reformism that social democracy was locked into.[10] Long

abandoning Marx's nostrum that "workers have no country", parties of the Second International first betrayed working class internationalism in 1914, and then became "national" socialists before anyone had ever heard of Adolf Hitler. In opposing the Fascist government's proposal of official condolences to the German state on Ebert's death, Damen was also, by implication, criticising the Comintern's "united front" strategy, and Gramsci's idea that Fascism could only be opposed in alliance with the very reformist Socialists who the Italian Communists had broken with just 4 years earlier. The second speech is a forensic statistical refutation of what the reality of Fascist rule meant for the working class.[11] Using what data was available, Damen revealed declining living standards of workers in the previous three years of Fascist rule. Their fake ideology of the reconciliation of classes in their corporations supposedly representing workers and employers was revealed by the fall in real wages. Unable to answer Damen's figures, the Fascist thug, Roberto Farinacci[12] was reduced to argumentum ad hominem, by repeating the false accusation against Damen of forging a leave of absence document at his Army trial six years earlier. He was not actually found guilty of this but sentenced to two and half years of imprisonment for promoting revolutionary defeatism in the Army. As can be seen in the transcript, Damen had the last word in this debate but Fascist accusations that he was a "criminal" would carry over into others that followed.

Abstentionism Then and Now

For some comrades today it may seem strange at this distance of time that a member of the Communist Abstentionist Fraction of the PSI, a supporter of the Theses on Abstentionism[13] presented by Bordiga to the Second Comintern Congress (1920), and still at loggerheads with the imposed PCd'I leadership over the "united front", should find himself in a parliament at all.

So let's make some points of clarification. In the first place the theses of the Abstentionist Communist Fraction received less support than the official theses (drafted by Bukharin) which were accepted as policy by the above-mentioned Congress. It also has to be remembered there was no disagreement in all the budding Communist parties that Parliament was not a road to power. Trotsky introduced the debate on the Theses on Parliamentarism at the Second Comintern Congress by noting that "from the epoch of the First International, the attitude of the socialist parties to parliamentarism was that bourgeois parliaments should be used for agitational purposes. Participation in parliament was considered as a means of developing class consciousness."

However, with the expansion of capitalism and parliamentary democracy, "the struggle for reforms within the framework of capitalism became increasingly significant" for the socialist parties of the Second International and the result was that "careerism and corruption flourished and the vital interests of the working class were secretly, and sometimes openly betrayed". Added to this, the role of parliament had also changed with the "new epoch". "In the modern conditions of unbridled imperialism parliament has become a weapon of falsehood, deception and violence, a place of enervating chatter. In the face of the devastation, embezzlement, robbery and destruction committed by imperialism, parliamentary reforms … lose all practical significance for the working masses." Trotsky concluded that "at the present time parliament cannot be used by the Communists as an arena in which to struggle for reforms and improvements in working-class living standards as was the case at certain times during the

past period." For all those adhering to the Communist International the aim was not to win power through parliament but by "*breaking and destroying it and replacing it with new organs of proletarian power*".[14]

All the communists at the Second Congress could agree on this as it was the basis of their common break with Social Democracy. Bordiga himself also made it clear in the debate that the difference was a tactical one. The Italians, scarred by the experience of the PSI's reformist wing headed by Claudio Treves and Filippo Turati, feared that any participation in the electoral process would divert the party back on to the reformist road at the expense of the revolutionary work inside the working class.

Damen later realised that the Italian Communists had made a mistake in posing the split with the PSI around the tactical question of abstentionism. All it did was delay the formation of a communist party until January 1921 at Livorno. In his view the PCd'I could have been formed at the height of the Red Two Years by splitting from the PSI at its Bologna Conference in 1919 if it had put the goal of communism before the tactical issue of abstentionism.[15] By 1921 it was already too late. The revolutionary wave was already ebbing and the bourgeoisie was already prepared to dispose of the facade of parliamentary democracy in favour of Fascism. And as it was at Livorno the new party took the internationalist title "Section of the Third International". The significance of this was that they expected the Third Communist International to act on its proclaimed strategic goal of spreading the world revolution. This was why Bordiga could accept membership of the Communist International even at the cost of abandoning the abstentionist tactic. As a result the new Italian "Section" put up candidates in the elections of 1921 and 1924. Damen himself also explained when parliamentary tactics could be used, and when they could not.

> *The revolutionary party goes over to sabotaging elections when the proletariat is on the offensive and the immediate prospect of power beckons. In this phase there is no place for the tactical use of the electoral system and to act on this terrain would lead to the dispersal of the movement, always a dangerous thing … thus the abstentionist tactic against any electoral participation and for boycotting parliament is valid in the crucial phase of class conflict, when the entire party organisation must not be diverted from the enormous offensive to conquer power. In all other cases, when faced with an electoral battle we have to assess whether or not to use the electoral system on a case by case basis.*[16]

The Matteotti crisis only underlined his conviction here, especially as by this time the Fourth Comintern Congress in 1922 had adopted the "united front", and the tactic of a "workers' government" with the very Socialists the Italian comrades had split from only the year before. The founding leadership of the PCd'I came to see the new policy as an opportunist move by the Russian Party in a bid to save the Russian Revolution at the expense of the world revolution. It was one thing for Communist militants to cooperate in the class war with rank and file Socialists in the factories and communities ("a united front from below") but quite another to think they could enter government with the Socialists (like Ebert) who had done so much to save capitalism in the post-war world. In opposing revolution everywhere the Socialist parties had already made their choice. They were for capitalism, and it was equally ridiculous for them enter into alliance with the Communists. The policy thus collapsed under the weight of this absurdity,

but not before it humiliated the cause of communism. After the fiasco of its failure in Germany in 1923, Bordiga was already demanding that the slogans of the "united front" and "workers' government" should be buried.

However, by this time the balance of power had shifted against the working class everywhere, meanwhile the possibilities for legal opposition in Italy were much diminished. With its leaders under threat of arrest the parliamentary faction of the PCd'I's immunity from prosecution made them the last voice of resistance to the Fascist regime. It was thus in the overwhelmingly Fascist-dominated Chamber of Deputies that Damen could find the only "tribune", the only platform, on which to fight back. It was a last gesture of defiance. Within a few months most of the PCd'I leaders, including Damen and Gramsci, were arrested. Gramsci would die in captivity in 1937, whilst Damen would spend the next two decades, either in Fascism's prisons and concentration camps, or in internal exile (confino).

In the last of these, in Cantú (Lombardy), he would encounter Luciano Stefanini, a representative of the Italian Communist Left in exile. He had clandestinely re-entered Italy in late 1942, and the political basis for the formation of a new internationalist party against all sides (including the USSR) in the imperialist war was agreed. In 1943 strikes broke out across the North of Fascist Italy and this gave the impetus for the clandestine formation of the PCInt. Its militants were deeply involved in those strikes but its opposition to both Stalinism and Fascism would cost the lives of several members before the war ended, murdered both by the Gestapo, and the Italian Communist Party (PCI), now headed by Togliatti.[17]

In 1945, with the Allied victory and the final defeat of Fascism, the Italian bourgeoisie could change tack once again. After removing the monarchy (a handy scapegoat for the capitalist class for its role in accepting Fascism), the new Italian Republic called the first real elections for two decades. This created a dilemma for the young PCInt. In 1946 they participated in local elections with the traditional purpose of making propaganda but in 1948 the first general election posed a bigger question. Some comrades wanted to abstain and denounce the entire electoral process, others to use the opportunity to once more make propaganda for the growing Party. Those who wanted to participate argued that the election would give the young Party a public platform in opposition to the Stalinists (who had the help of Soviet finance) in front of the working class. The deciding factor for participation was the legal fact that parties which put up candidates got the right to speak in the hustings, or public meetings, held in every town or district square in Italy. At a time when mass media was still in its infancy, these open air meetings had much greater significance than today. This tipped the argument in favour of formally putting up candidates. However, it was agreed that this participation would be based on the abstentionist call not to vote for anyone. The main leaflet issued during the campaign was entitled "*Don't Vote for Any Party*". As it openly explained;

> *We internationalists entered this electoral battle not to ask for votes, but only because it allows us to say with more effectiveness and sense of reality to the masses, who still believe in the mystification of elections, that the proletariat will revive, will find itself and the way to overcome the forces of war, only on the day that it acquires the consciousness and the power to sweep away all the rotten ballot papers and parliament.*[18]

As Damen later wrote, it was "probably the last time" that such an opportunity would present itself, and in the pre-internet (and indeed pre-television) era the odds were not so heavily stacked against the tactic of using the electoral process to make revolutionary propaganda. Today any such participation is more likely to strengthen the ideological power of capital considering the financial resources given by the capitalists to the parties inside the system.

Amongst these are the parties of the xenophobic Right spearheaded by Trump but which can be found across Europe and elsewhere. Ironically this new Right, in criticising the previous capitalist policy of globalisation, claims to speak for the workers who have lost jobs whilst being themselves financed by plutocrats. This is not unlike the Fascists who Damen was attacking a hundred years ago, posing as being the movement for all classes in the interests of the one great nation. In their world-view, workers are not exploited by capital but are just the victims of "rip-offs" by "foreigners". According to them, it was not the fault of the capitalists that they stopped investing in jobs at home in the 1980s, but the fault of countries like China who "stole" those jobs by paying their workers less, and migrants who "steal" jobs by moving to countries with better wages and conditions.

The similarities with a century ago end there. Damen was speaking as the post-war revolutionary impetus of the working class across the world was ending. Today the global system is in deep crisis and has been for half a century. It has survived on one expedient after another but has manifestly now reached a new turning point. If Dr Samuel Johnson once said patriotism was "the last resort of a scoundrel", today nationalism is the last resort of a system that offers only a future of declining living standards, generalised war and a climate emergency. We are rapidly approaching a historical settling of accounts both on the imperialist and on the class war fronts. The only possible force which can halt the decline into barbarism is the world working class.

However, for the last half century the working class has been on the retreat. As a consequence of the global crisis, living conditions in the leading capitalist countries (and beyond) have declined, whilst the increased capacity for conditioning and control that the bourgeoisie and its state apparatus can exercise over the proletariat, has increased. The new forces of the xenophobic Right are an expression that the old expedients (for example, globalisation) have failed to revive the process of accumulation of capital. Instead new "scapegoats" have to be found in those migrants fleeing the disasters the global capitalism system has already created in their homelands. The basic function of the reactionary movements, when capitalism "struggles" under the weight of its insoluble contradictions, when traditional capitalist parties have been unable to resolve the crisis of accumulation for decades, is to come up with a quick and simple fix. Their narrow national solutions are as dangerous as they are bogus, and will only channel the mass of the population to the road towards supporting inter-imperialist conflict. Like Fascism in the past, the xenophobic nationalist agenda can, and must, be effectively fought but not by trying to defend or revive bourgeois parliamentarism, in the name of the defence of "democracy", but only by overthrowing the entire political power of the bourgeoisie and its institutions (of which they are just the latest expression), alongside the economic regime of exploitation that is at the basis of its existence.[19] This is what we are fighting for today just as Damen and his comrades did a century ago when the stakes for the world working class were just as high.

Session of the Chamber of Deputies 9 March 1925[20]: Communists Oppose the Fascist Vote to Honour Ebert

PRESIDENT.[21] The Honourable Damen has asked to speak. He has the floor:

DAMEN. The Communist parliamentary group has asked me to speak about the commemoration, not as an act of solidarity, but to recall here how too many murdered workers shed a sinister light on the figure of the late President of the German Republic. *(Loud noises — Protests).*

PRESIDENT. Honourable Damen!...

DAMEN. It may be a rather effective argument for you, in your commemorative rhetoric, that a humble saddle-maker rose to the pinnacle of the highest and most honourable office in the German state (unfortunately miracles of this kind also occur in our house); *(Laughter — Interruptions — Noises)* but for us Communists the greatest and best statement about Ebert's life was offered by Ebert himself when he declared before the Magdeburg juries that he had joined the war strike committee in order to sabotage the strike itself.[22]

Everything about Ebert, everything about German Social Democracy, is expressed in this sincere sentence! Ebert did not betray the interests of German capitalism. He defended them. Ebert betrayed only the German proletariat. *(Interruptions — Noises — Calls from the President.)*

FEDERZONI [Minister of the Interior]. We cannot allow people to talk like this, and to say these things in here! He was the head of a friendly state... *(Loud approval)*

DAMEN. The German people, who are currently subjected to the most shameful economic and political tyranny, say so. The murdered Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg confirm it. The workers shot in the streets of Hamburg reveal it. *(Loud noises — Interruptions)*

Voices. The German Socialists wanted the war, and the Communists too!

DAMEN. Therefore the Communist parliamentary group is not in solidarity with the commemoration of Ebert, the murderer of the German proletariat. *(Applause from the far left — Loud noise and protests on the other benches.)*

PRESIDENT. Honourable Damen, we must be more dignified about a funeral! *(Approving noises).*

The Honourable Minister of the Interior has asked to speak. He has the floor.

FEDERZONI. The Government, confident of interpreting the feelings of all Italian citizens and of the great majority of the Chamber, strongly protests against the inappropriate words uttered in this Chamber by the Honourable Damen. *(Loud applause — Comments from the far left)*

PRESIDENT. On behalf of the Chamber, I support the noble words uttered by the Minister of the Interior.

The universal mourning for the death of the eminent Head of the German Republic is due not only to the singular virtues of the man, by which he could rise from humble origins to the highest offices of the State *(Comments on the extreme left)*, but also to the political wisdom he demonstrated in seven years of difficult government, (thus) contributing to world peace. *(Loud approval).*

I agree with the proposal of the Government representative to send to the President of the Reichstag expressions of condolence from all of Italy.

A voice on the extreme left. Not all of the people! *(Very loud noises — Protests).*

PRESIDENT. Silence!

Whoever approves of these proposals, please stand up. *(They are approved).*

Session of the Chamber of Deputies 11 March 1925: Fascism as the Guard Dog of Property[23]

PRESIDENT: […] The floor is now open to the Honourable Damen who has presented the following agenda:

"The Chamber recognises that the driving down of the industrial and agricultural proletariat back into a condition of hunger and slavery is entirely due to Government policy."

DAMEN: When the Communist parliamentary group questioned the Prime Minister and the members of the Government over the problem of the high cost of living, they already knew that the response would be … silence.

So now we are entering the debate on the domestic budget. However, we do understand that, even with an elegant piece of parliamentary dialectics, the Government cannot surmount the not very cheerful overall economic reality of our country. So we are not aiming to push the Government into another economic policy, one capable of solving the serious problem of the high cost of living in 24 hours (the Mussolini system). That would be the same as asking the Fascist head of the Italian bourgeois government for the solution to the problem of squaring the circle ...

Instead, we communists use the rather serious expedient of parliamentary activity to deepen — with serious, cold, objective analysis — the study of the phenomena that arise from the development of the capitalist system and to frankly tell the country all our thoughts, which are the sum of our own experience: the experience of the Italian proletariat.

For example, the bourgeois parties — anti-Fascist because they are failed Fascists — in order to conduct a political struggle against Mussolini's government, they use the crisis caused by the high cost of living to shout about incompetence, to mock anyone who focuses on politics and economics and simply trace the crisis back, or trace it back only, to the trampling over statutory liberties. We will demonstrate how this is all demagogy and how Fascists and bourgeois anti-Fascists share responsibility, thus nailing them to the same condemnation.

To the parties of Social Democracy, both unitary and maximalist[24], who are accustomed to beg for compromise and who, like disappointed beggars, attribute the diminished daily bread in already meagre proletarian meals entirely to the ill will of certain men who today are wearing black shirts, we deny them the right to go on speaking in the name of the proletariat.

Italian Social Democracy is not, nor can it be, different from the international one. It cannot understand; it is incapable of examining phenomena of the economic crisis such as the high cost of living, too accustomed by now to smoothing over and cushioning the harsh, inevitable shocks that occur in class conflicts.

We know, we have known, many foolish servants in life. However, it is difficult to find more foolish servants in international political life than the Social Democrats, reduced as they are by capitalism to a precise historical function, which is that of weighing like a dead body that is tightly gripped to the joints of the international proletariat.

We have many things to say to the governing party, and many open accounts to settle with it.

(Interruptions – Noise)

First of all, under the scrutiny of communist criticism, there does not exist a Fascist party which acted autonomously in the struggle to establish itself and conquer

power. Nothing was predetermined or desired beforehand by some sort of expansion process that first worked itself out in the economic sphere and then, in a certain period of upheaval, leapt into the political superstructure of our country as a new, original, politically empowered form, truly felt in extent and depth by the majority of the Italian people. *(Noise).* We communists deny all this to the Fascist movement, and even before we did – truly – the history of these recent years has denied it.

When the economic clashes between the most industrially rich countries violently opened the classical period of imperialism, characterised by the urgent, immediate need to conquer new and larger international markets, we saw our own bourgeoisie waving the flag of revolutionary war in the streets and making use of the betrayal of many leading subversives of the time: the same ones who today figure as exponents of the governing party.

A voice: For you it is a question of profession!

DAMEN. It's really a profession for many of you! *(Noise).*

From 1914 to 1919, from 1919 to 1922, we can observe in Italy not the formation of a new political party, not the elaboration of a new political doctrinal creed, but the logical and relentless development of an action directed and conducted by the ruling class for its own defence, for its self-preservation.

This is why today we can state that in the Fascist party, in the Fascist government, we recognise the political victory of the most aggressive and most violently strong-willed elements of the capitalist system. Given this, it is infinitely easy to explain how and to what extent Fascism has managed to disengage itself from its lofty historical function as the guard dog of property. *(Noise).*

The fight apparently conducted against the democratic State has served to hide more or less skilfully the methodical, progressive and ferociously violent destruction of organisations defending the interests of the workers. The hunt for the subversive, the unpatriotic, is always accompanied by the crushing of a resistance league or by taking possession of a People's House (Casa del popolo) or a Chamber of Labour or a Consumer or Production Cooperative. *(Noises – Interruptions).*

Honourable Panunzio[25], all the former subversives are the most ferocious against us!

Having silenced the working class parties once and for all, having reduced them to living the shady and ever-wary life of a sect, having put the worker in the position of no longer being able to defend his wages through the class union and his moral conquests from thirty years of innumerable sacrifices and struggles torn away day by day, fascism — we recognise — has the merit, its greatest merit in the face of capitalism, of having made the producer a slave, and the masters — already venerable and astute knights of industry, a modern, well-equipped and insatiable association of slave traders! *(Noise).*

A voice in the centre. Don't talk nonsense!

Another voice. Yes! Uncle Tom's cabin!

DAMEN. A bourgeois economist from France, Mr. Paul Leroy-Beaulieu[26] (Comments), has written about the development of joint-stock companies that control 350 billion in France, that is to say half of the national wealth. He wrote as follows:

"Those who, in other times, in the Middle Ages, were the great companies of adventurers and brigands who robbed merchants and plundered the countryside, are today joint-stock companies! They are astute and methodical organisations for plunder!"

SANSANELLI.[27] Pass this page on to the Honourable Graziadei!

DAMEN. They are your economists! I am briefly and roughly summarising what

has happened in recent years, to the detriment, of course, of the working classes.

But don't wait, don't wait for us to come and beg for mercy for the vanquished! *(Comments).*

The Communist Party leaves the task of formulating the ethical questions of class collaboration to the Social Democratic parties! *(Interruptions – Comments).*

The Communist Party knows how to defeat the enemies of the proletariat, and is thus working hard to shift the current balance of power between the two hostile classes. For us it is now obvious that, as the capitalist economy develops, it emphatically overpowers and eliminates any opposition that bases its class resistance around a question of sentiment and conciliation.

In fact, in order to defeat the proletariat — which became more combative in the post-war period, and had even been an autonomous factor at the beginning of capitalism's war crisis, something which led inevitably to a new war: its civil war — a strong State was necessary, a reactionary Government: yours! One that would break away the means of defence from the hands of the producer, specifically in the shape of the union. And the political crushing of the proletariat also means certain starvation of the subject class… *(Interruptions)* First, let's all look at the real economic situation of capitalism. [Here's an] Excerpt from Mortara's Economic Perspectives[28] [with] some statements that are very precious for their objectivity and authority. Mining production continues to progress slowly. Instead, there is growing rapidly … *(Interruptions)*

It seems to me….

A voice: That we are adversaries.

DAMEN … that there is such political ignorance on your part, which is truly worthy of the Italian Chamber. *(Loud noises – Protests).*

PRESIDENT. Honourable Damen! And they should be silent, I beg you, honourable deputies.

DAMEN. So Mortara, one of your economists, writes …

Voices: No, no!

DAMEN. … of democracy, of the bourgeoisie therefore. *(Interruptions).*

I repeat, Mortara writes:

"*Mining production continues to progress slowly. On the other hand, production from quarries is increasing rapidly due to the lively spur from urban construction. The industries that transform raw materials are all in good condition. The rapid and general rise in the share prices of industrial companies from the autumn of 1923 to the autumn of 1924 is a symptom of the favourable development of business. The machine tool industries, through the progress of their technical and commercial organisation, make for further development of production and increase the variety … (Interruptions – Talking)*

They are also extending their sales to foreign markets. Here it is enough to recall the increase from 9,395 automobiles exported in the first months of 1923 to 15,037 in the corresponding period of 1924… (Interruptions)

The brick industry is recovering due to the now general and spontaneous extension of building activity. The same factor promotes the progress of other industries, or those accessory to those of construction. The economic organism", Mortara summarises, "*is healthy and resilient, and will be able to overcome without damage the period of domestic political convulsions, as 1924 dies and 1925 is born.*"

I take from the Political and Economic Review that according to directors Scialoja, Olivetti, Fontana: "*In the second half of 1924 the inflow of new capital into ordinary joint-stock companies was far greater than that of all the previous half-years starting from the second half of 1920. Capital increases were more numerous and more conspicuous*

than those of the second half of 1923." *(Interruptions – Noise).*

PRESIDENT. Honourable colleagues, take your seats, and let the speaker speak.

DAMEN. Overall, total investment in the second half of last year was approximately 3 billion and 153 million lire while that of the half-year of 1923 had been 1 billion and 744 million. Disinvestments, on the other hand, were more numerous in the period under examination, but less conspicuous. A total of 547 million lire of disinvestments in the second half of last year against almost 629 in the corresponding period of the previous year.

Thus, the increase in Italian share capital, which in the second half of 1923 had been one billion and 1156 million, reached the conspicuous sum of 2 billion and 606.8 million lire in the same half of 1924. *(Interruptions).*

A comment is then added that the achievement of this brilliant result was mainly due to the good general performance of the Italian economy, in particular the commercial and industrial recovery, and the good dividends that were distributed at the end of 1923.

A group of companies that comprises a very strong investment is the textile industry. (Approximately 1286 million lire).

Worthy of mention is the increase achieved by the Italian company Viscosa-Roma which enhanced its capital from 60 to 100 million lire. *(Interruptions).*

That of the company La Soie de Châtilon, Milan (from 75 to 150 million). The Cotonificio Veneziano (from 30 to 50 million). The Società Seta artificiali, Varedo-Milano (from 10 to 40 million). Of the artificial silk, Cremona (from 50 thousand to 15 million). *(Interruptions).* The southern cotton factories (from 80 to 100 million).

The chemical industries showed a very conspicuous movement. Among the companies that increased their capital, we note: Orogna, a company for the manufacture of synthetic ammonia, Milan (from 10 to 30 million lire). Mira Lanza-Milano (from 1 to 40 million). The Italian Electrochemical Society, Rome (from 21 to 42 million). The Italian factories of Bonelli colourants, Milan (from 15 to 40 million). The Italian Gas Company, Turin (from 20 to 80 million). The Italian Ausonia Company, Milan (from 100 thousand to 50 million). Car manufacturing and related industries also show a strong net investment due to the very strong increase in capital from 200 to 400 million lire of Fiat of Turin. The agricultural and food industries have had, in the period under examination, a capital increase of almost 192 and a half million and that means they alone absorbed about 8% of the overall increase that occurred in all joint stock companies in that period.

Finally, if what has been stated so far were not enough, here is the 1924 balance sheet of Snia-Viscosa published in almost all the newspapers last February, showing the increase in capital from 600 million to one billion lire. Listen:

"*Gentlemen shareholders. We present for your approval the individual items of the balance of 31 December last which we believe do not require particular clarification. They correspond to those of the previous financial year and attest to the growing development of the Company. ...*

The profit and loss account closes with a profit balance of 60,075,562.33.

Dividend 10% to shareholders. Total dividend 41,250,000.".

As for the workforce, it states: "*We have not been able to devote all the care we should have to wages, harassed as we are by countless other requirements, perpetually hindered by having to hire new inexperienced personnel who are therefore incapable of good*

performance. But we feel that the future of our country lies in the moral elevation of the workers, in the increase of wages in line with growing productivity. When the plants are completed and the workforce has assumed a stable base we will tenaciously pursue the aim of improving the moral situation of the workers and increasing their compensation by involving them in production". No comment!

(Interruptions — Noise).

Now let's contrast the situation of the capitalists with that of the workers:

1. The advent of the fascist regime has marked the de facto cancellation of every existing labour agreement.
2. The destruction of class unions by the fascists, as well as the non-recognition of the rights of organisations, *(interruptions)* have deliberately allowed the capitalists to reduce workers' wages to starvation levels and to cancel every moral conquest.
3. The worsening conditions of workers do not depend on the worsening conditions of industry, but on the political situation determined by the fascist regime.
4. The cost of living, like unemployment, weighs fatally on fascism because they are inherent to the bourgeois system.

If economists like Minister De Stefani deny it, economic experience — or rather the experience of the 'New Era' of these last few years — demonstrates how the arc of capitalism's development is also the history of the progressive accentuation of the impoverishment of workers...

DE STEFANI, [Finance Minister]. What you are saying is entirely false! In Italy, individual consumption increased in 1923 relative to 1922 and in 1924 relative to 1923. (Approving noises and comments). **GENNARI.**[29] On the contrary, wages are falling. Your statistics are false. *(Interruptions – Noises).* **DAMEN.** After these theoretical premises, the figures.

Since there are no labour agreements, and since the wages currently in practice vary from region to region, the data I am listing are either the result of my own investigation, or are taken from the rare, very rare, statistics that do exist. I am taking this from a letter from FIOT[30] to industrialists employing flax and hemp workers. Here, in a few figures, are the workers' conditions: According to the agreement of 22 November 1920, the average daily wage for women: ten lire and eighty-seven cents, men: seventeen and a half lire, average after the reduction of 3 October 1921: women: 9.57, men: 15.95.

Voice from the centre. And piecework?

DAMEN. Average after the concordat of December 12, 1921: women: 10.17; men: 17.15 lire. On the other hand, the cost of living indices… A voice. But these are the FIOT agreements, not ours which are very different!

DAMEN. On the other hand, the cost of living indices, compared on the basis of the new series on the three dates that mark the above-mentioned movement of wages were: up to October 1920 109.51 points. Up to September 1921, 118.77; end of November 1924, 126.24; at the end of January 1925, then, the index was still at 129.32 so the jump in the cost of living, from the moment the peak of wages was reached, was 19.81 points.

A voice. But the calculation doesn't add up in this way! *(Comments – Laughs).*

DAMEN. Still on textiles. In Verona in the Festi and Rasini factories the average daily wage was a minimum of eight lire up to a maximum of eleven lire. In Schio, a very important wool centre, in 1921-22 the Veneto Wool Concordat established the average wage for men at 22-23 lire; for women 15-16 lire; in 1923-24 the proforma agreement established, stipulated by the Italian Textile Union (Catholic) establishes – always assuming the

agreement is followed – an average wage of 70-75 lire per week. In the Southern Cotton Industries in Naples, the Preziosi pact of 1922, which has not even been carried out, has implemented a 25% decrease in the wages established by the 1921 national agreement of the FIOT. *(Interruptions – Noises).* The current average wages of chemical workers in Veneto, Emilia, and Tuscany are as follows: for men, 12 to 14 lire a day; for women, 5 to 6 lire a day, with an average of nine hours of work per day. *(Interruptions – Noises).* In the valleys of Comacchio: daily wages are 10 lire. The workers, for having asked for a raise, saw their wages reduced to 6.50 lire. *(Comments).* In Ferrara, those who work with shovels on the Mantua-Ferrara line earn an hourly wage of 1.20 lire. *(Interruptions – Noises).* Voices from the right. Stop making these statements. Go and tell them these things at rallies!

DAMEN. In the Cremonese area, as I said, the fiefdom of the Honorable Farinacci, agricultural labourers earned 135 lire net in the winter. *(Interruptions – Noises – Insults aimed at the speaker – Many Members are blocking the aisles of the Chamber)*

PRESIDENT. Quiet! I ask the honourable police commissioners to have the hall cleared.

FARINACCI. The farmers of Cremona have had a 13 million increase in socialist wages! You are an impostor! *(Applause – Protests from the far left)*

PRESIDENT. Do not interrupt, honourable colleagues! And take your seats. Honourable Damen, try to conclude. As you know, the Rules of Procedure do not allow reading for more than a quarter of an hour.

DAMEN. I have finished. In the South, wages vary from five to ten lire at most. (Interruptions). The wages of approximately 30 thousand women who work in tobacco handling in Salento (Lecce) range from 3.50 to 6.50 at most. This maximum is paid to a few female workers; the common average is 4.50. *(Interruptions – Noises).* It can be said, because it is proven, that wages decrease at the same time that the cost of living continues to increase.

Another bourgeois economist, Achille Loria[31] *(noises)* writes… "*that in the years 1920-21 the monetary wages achieved by the various professional categories barely manage to meet the increased cost of living. Later in 1922-23, due to the ever more accentuated reduction of nominal wages on the one hand and the progressive continuous increase in the cost of living on the other, real wages are placed at a level considerably lower than that of the pre-war period.*"

Taking the average wage of 1913 as a basis as equal to 100, Tremelloni[32] calculates in the following figures the decline to 1924:

Year	**Wage index**
1921	96.4
1922	94
1923	91
1924	90

It should be noted that the index corresponding to 1924 calculated by Tremelloni is much lower because he published his results at the end of the year, when the notable and widespread increases in the cost of living in the final part of last year had not yet occurred.

Moving on to the wages of land workers (farmhands, day labourers, construction workers, etc.), it can be asserted with absolute certainty, although there are no statistics, that the conditions of agricultural workers are far inferior to those before the war… *(Interruptions – Noises).*

In Abruzzo and Puglia and in other regions of Southern Italy, agricultural workers receive wages ranging from 6 to 8 lire for men and from 4 to 5 lire for women. *(Interruptions – Noises).*

FARINACCI. Convicted criminal!

Imposter!

DAMEN. The figures are subversive…

FARINACCI. Convicted criminal! Forger! Honourable President, the Rules of Procedure allow for no more than a quarter of an hour of reading, while the Honourable Damen has been reading for an hour!

DAMEN. So, to sum up, we can definitively state that the increased working hours, like the wages that have been halved, are complemented by the cost of living that has now reached a level six times higher than that of the immediate pre-war period. What should Italian workers do in these conditions?

Voices. Revolution! Revolution!

DAMEN. Thus a serious, threatening political question is posed… *(Interruptions).*

By putting an end to, I don't know if stupidity has surpassed ferocity here, by putting an end to, as I was saying, the Honourable Matteotti, you have unwittingly given impetus to that renewed combativeness of the working class that no longer stops, not even in the face of threats, such as in the speech of 3 January.[33]

We were once again hit by police measures but they do not weaken us; they hit us as parties and the trade unions we lead, whatever Amendola's Il Mondo[34] and that embittered counter-revolutionary who answers to the name of Gino Baldesi[35] might say!… You can order the closure of the offices of the FILIL[36], which is one of the few national federations directed by communists … you can dissolve the sections of the FIOT, in Trieste, Gorizia, Bari, directed by communists.

The prefect of Foggia can close the Chamber of Labour there and keep the keys with him; you can do that, perhaps more and even worse, but you Fascists will never be capable of stopping the precise and inflexible will of the Italian proletariat, determined to win back its lost positions. It's a question of strength! (Interruptions – Noise).

TERUZZI.[37] Make up your mind!

DAMEN. It is a question of strength, but it is also a question of life! The numerous economic upheavals underway do not tell you anything!

They simply tell us that it is the class struggle, which you believed suppressed. It is the new influx of workers into the ranks of class unions; it is the collapse into ridicule of that mammoth forced domicile that are the Fascist corporations. *(Noise).*

Your unionism has three names that burn you: San Giovanni Valdarno, Carrara, Brescia![38] The sacrifice of thousands of workers… *(Comments – Noise).*

Yesterday I reserved for you the most atrocious mockery, worthy in truth of the little men of the political decadence of our country.

Today, however, the mockery has the flavour of tragedy. So be it!

A historical memory. When, in October 1922, you elevated to the level of theory the need for armed insurrection to overthrow the democratic State and this because you felt the paths of legal conquest were too arduous, if not completely precluded, you did nothing but clarify with the sound of the truncheon in the minds of the Italian worker, these statements of ours which also have the value of a great historical truth: against force, a greater and better force! Against weapons, weapons! *(Interruptions – Noise).*

Only the revolutionary conquest of political power by the workers and peasants will be able to solve the problems of bread and freedom for the proletariat. *(Applause from the far left – Prolonged noise).*

PRESIDENT. The Honorable Farinacci has asked to speak on a personal matter. He has the floor.

FARINACCI. Since the Communist speaker just now, speaking of the province of Cremona, mentioned the wages of the labourers, which according to him, are about

135 lire per month, or rather per season, I must answer, both to establish the truth and to demonstrate what the adversaries' weapons are, that in the province of Cremona the labourers are paid two and twenty lire per hour, which multiplied by eight hours makes 17.60 lire per day. Now this figure multiplied by the number of working days gives much more than the 135 lire that the Honourable Damen mentioned in his speech.

For this reason I would like to say only this, for the seriousness of the discussion: when you want to quote data, you must at least ask for them precisely from your own trustees in that province!

But it is not permissible to insult a trade union movement like the one in Cremona! The speaker knows very well that the farmers have recently had a 13 million increase in one day's socialist wages, not only that, but that all (and the Honourable Barbiellini said it a moment ago), all the municipal employees and all the other categories of workers have had improvements!

This has been our work in our province with the triumph of class collaboration.

And we can still say that it is not right that a man like the Honourable Damen, who has an unclean criminal record... *(Shouts of approval - Applause)* comes to talk to us about morality!

FERRARI. This is an infamy!

TERUZZI. That's right! It's on record! *(Noise from the far left).*

DAMEN. I ask to speak on a personal matter.

PRESIDENT. Silence! Honourable Damen, indicate your personal matter.

DAMEN. The data that the Honourable Farinacci wanted to cite in contrast to those provided by me...

Voice in the centre. But you're talking about the criminal record, not the data!

DAMEN. …they show how deep the gap is. However, since our two assessments can be true or false, the proletariat of Cremona will have the opportunity to judge between me and you, Honourable Farinacci!

As for the forgery...

TERUZZI. At least you should have waited for it to be validated!

DAMEN. As for the forgery, Honourable Farinacci and the Honourable President Casertano know the value of this forgery!

A voice. There is a sentence! Forgery of a deportation order!

DAMEN. The sentence refers to a trial undergone during military service for the following crimes: 1) public insults against military institutions; 2) forgery. Do you know what the forgery was?

Voices. Forgery of a deportation order!

DAMEN. During the house search carried out at the time of my arrest, the military authorities found, among the various papers, an old document, a military deportation order, not used but simply filled out. This is the truth!

FARINACCI. It is signed! It is false. *(Protests from the far left).*

DAMEN. If Farinacci has not actually seen it, go read the verdict. And if he has run out of candles, he can go to bed in the dark! *(Noise – Comments).*

PRESIDENT. The incident is over. The continuation of this discussion is postponed to tomorrow.[39]

Notes

1. It would require a book to describe the machinations of the Italian bourgeoisie in establishing a parliament. Italy was basically formed in 1861 after the conquest of the peninsula by the Kingdom of Sardinia (of which Piedmont was the seat of power). It was a confection "from above". At that time only 1 in 4 of the population were literate and the new state lacked means of communication (in every sense). In Piedmont, the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia, Cavour, had made a mockery of

even the limited vote in his connubio (marriage) with Rattazzi, the leader of what then posed as the Left in Piedmont, to keep out the extremes of both the Right and the Left. In the new Italy the practice was carried on by Depretis and was known as trasformismo which became almost a synonym for corruption. In the underdeveloped South or Mezzogiorno (and beyond) "clientelism" or caciquismo decided elections. The whole system depended on the apathy and exclusion of the majority of the population. Universal manhood suffrage only arrived in 1912 and only one election was held under it. In anyone's terms it was "a regime which best be described as a limited and artificial democracy" (Adrian Lyttelton The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy 1919-29, Weidenfeld and Nicholson 1973, p.7). And when the working class started to arrive on the stage in political terms it is easy to understand amidst this general political cynicism how Italian capitalists readily turned to Fascism.

2. There is no clearer indication of the bourgeoisie's indifference to parliamentary democracy (which they claim legitimises them) than the fact that the Fascists had failed miserably in elections in 1919, but in 1921 were gifted 35 seats on the Liberal list by its leader Giovanni Giolitti. It was a reward for the Fascist violence against striking workers during the Biennio Rosso. Even then the Fascists still had to work to get the Pope to force the resignation of the leader of the Catholic Peoples' Party, Don Sturzo, and win over many Liberals to vote in the new law. In the end the institutions of the Italian monarchy, including the Army leaders and King Victor Emmanuel III himself, all acquiesced in the violence of the Fascist squadristi and the takeover of the state.

3. See *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2024-08-29/the-murder-of-giacomo-matteotti-100-years-on* As the articles in *Revolutionary Perspectives* make clear (although it was not known at the time) Mussolini had his own personal reasons for getting rid of Matteotti who had been in London investigating a corrupt deal of the Duce's family with a US oil company and was ready to expose him.

4. Damen was sent to France by the PCd'I after an armed attack on him by Fascists led to the death of a Fascist in 1921. Gramsci, who had not been present at the founding of the PCd'I in 1921, was sent to Moscow as its representative. While there he agreed to implement the Comintern's "united front" on his return to Italy and, using Bordiga's 1923 arrest as an excuse, he was made head of the PCd'I. Damen was elected for Florence, and Gramsci in the Veneto.

5. Damen himself was kidnapped by a Fascist gang in 1921 who tortured him first, in a failed attempt to make him renounce his "bolshevism". He was then passed on to Dumini (leader of Matteotti's murderers) who failed to prevent him standing in the election as a deputy for Florence city council but kept him locked up throughout the general strike of that year.

6. Mentioned in Damen's second speech was the editor of *Il Mondo*, Giovanni Amendola. Amendola actually provoked Mussolini into his speech of 3 January 1925 by publishing the Rossi Memorandum revealing Mussolini's criminal actions (which included a beating of Amendola himself). For this the 15 Fascists with "manganelli" (clubs) again set upon him in July 1925. Like many other opponents of Fascism, Amendola left the country but never recovered from the beating and died in Cannes in April 1926. *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giovanni_Amendola*

7. See *Lyttelton*, p.265.

8. For a more detailed discussion of this, including Damen's own views on Gramsci's failure, see the introduction to our pamphlet *Platform of the Committee of Intesa 1925 https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2011-11-01/platform-of-the-committee-of-intesa-1925*. Damen's more extended critique of Gramsci can be found in his book *Gramsci between Marxism and Idealism* now in English as a book or PDF. See *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-08-07/gramsci-between-marxism-and-idealism*

9. Amongst these, Damen (who was a noted public speaker) addressed the striking tobacco workers in the Papal factory in Trastevere, Rome. The Gramsci leadership realised at this point that the PCd'I deputies had immunity from arrest so they belatedly began to send them out to address workers (but without preparing

their defence amongst the workers) so it only meant they were target for beatings by Fascist squadristi.

10. Friedrich Ebert was leader of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), head of the provisional German government in the aftermath of the November Revolution of 1918, and the architect of the counter-revolution (after his famous telephone conversation with General Groener which unleashed the Freikorps on revolutionary workers). He was thus the executioner-in-chief of the revolutionary working class, along with its most famous defenders, Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg. For his part in saving German (and perhaps, world) capitalism he was elected President of the Weimar Republic. Founded in 1919, after the dissolution of the workers' and soldiers' councils, the German bourgeoisie were still so scared of "Red Berlin" that they established their parliamentary system in the university town of Weimar from which the Republic took its name.

11. It has already been published by the comrades of the Circolo Internazionalista "Coalizione operaia" - Prospettiva Marxista (Internationalist Circle "Workers Coalition" Marxist Perspective), whom we thank for having recovered and made available in Italian. See *https://coalizioneoperaia.com/2025/03/11/onorato-damen-il-fascismo-e-il-cane-da-guardia-della-proprieta/*

12. Roberto Farinacci was the main Fascist ras (local leader – the name came from Ethiopia as in "ras Tafari" as Haile Selassie was formally entitled) in Cremona where he was noted for his violent attacks on opponents (his nickname was "the castor oil man" as the Fascists poured this down victims' throats to induce severe diarrhoea). He was later sidelined by Mussolini for his continuous violence, but in 1925 he was at the height of his power as the Secretary of the National Fascist Party. A noted pro-German anti-semite, he was shot by a partisan firing squad in 1945 as he fled towards Germany.

13. See *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2005-06-01/abstentionism-theses-on-parliamentarism*

14. All the Trotsky quotes in this passage taken from *Theses, Manifestoes and Resolutions of the First Four Congresses of the Third International* (Ink Links, 1982) pp. 97-8. The full theses drafted by Bukharin and accepted as the position of the Communist International in 1920 can be found on the pages which follow.

15. Onorato Damen "Bologna 1919: The Congress that was afraid to say no to the International's policy of getting in as many as possible" (*Prometeo* No 8 January-June 1966), *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2015-03-01/bologna-1919-a-page-from-history* It can also be found in Onorato Damen, *Bordiga Beyond the Myth* (Prometheus Publications 2015) available from the CWO (£5 plus postage) or as a PDF at *https://www.leftcom.org/files/2018-10-02-damen-bordiga.pdf*

16. See *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2015-03-01/bologna-1919-a-page-from-history* for the full argument.

17. For details see *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2020-07-28/the-murders-of-fausto-atti-and-mario-acquaviva* and *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2020-07-25/remembering-the-early-comrades-of-the-internationalist-communist-party*

18. See *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2015-05-01/don-t-vote*

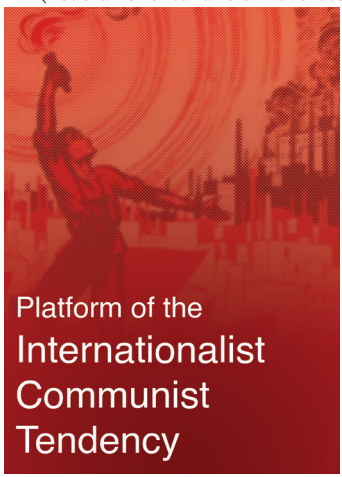
19. A message that can also be found in the leaflet our comrades of the Internationalist Communist Party (PCInt) published on the eightieth anniversary of Italy's "liberation day" on 25 April. *https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2025-06-10/the-real-anti-fascism-is-anti-capitalism*

20. Found in: *Atti del Parlamento Italiano - Discussioni della Camera dei Deputati, XXVII Legislatura - Sessione 1924 - 1925* (03/01/1925 - 30/03/1925), Volume (III), p.2329 (p.5 in the PDF: *https://storia.camera.it/regno/lavori/leg27/sed056.pdf*)

21. The President (or Speaker) of the Chamber of Deputies (appointed 5 January 1925) was a former Social Democrat, Antonio Casertano. After the Fascist March on Rome in 1922, he had frequent contacts with the Fascist Government and, as president of the Internal Affairs Committee of the Chamber, assured Mussolini of his support for the Acerbo Law, which reached the Chamber on 9 June 1923. At

the same time he tried to organise a large coalition of deputies from the South in favour of the Mussolini Government. A "national" socialist in every respect.
22. In December 1924, Ebert (who had been President of the Weimar Republic for 5 years by then) was accused by the editor of a monarchist journal of being a traitor for supporting a wartime munitions workers' strike in January 1918 that was alleged to have contributed to Germany's defeat. Ebert sued. His defence was that he had joined the strike committee only to limit the scope of the strike and bring it to a speedy end. It is to this that Damen refers directly here but the rest of his denunciation is based on the more well-known of Ebert's (and the SPD's) contribution to saving German capitalism from working class revolution at the end of the First World War. In a bizarre judgement, the Magdeburg judge gaoled the monarchist and ordered him to pay all costs, but then added that Ebert's defence was no excuse and he had been a traitor! See *https://time.com/archive/6652934/foreign-news-president-traitor/*
23. Found in: *Atti del Parlamento Italiano - Discussioni della Camera dei Deputati, XXVII Legislatura - Sessione 1924 - 1925* (03/01/1925 - 30/03/1925), Volume (III), pp.2446-2452 (pp.34-40 in the PDF: *https://storia.camera.it/regno/lavori/leg27/sed058.pdf)*
24. The reformist Unitary Socialist Party, led by Filippo Turati and Matteotti was expelled from the PSI by Serrati's "maximalists" in 1922. It ceased to exist by 1930.
25. Sergio Pannunzio (1886-1944) began as a syndicalist (in the Sorelian tradition) but became a major theoretician of the movement of many syndicalists into the corporatism of Fascism.
26. The original typescript has "Leroy-Reaulieu" but this is the economist who is regarded as a precursor of the Austrian school of Von Mises and Hayek, who reject the need for the state to correct the imperfections of capitalism and thus are godfathers of today's "neo-liberalism".
27. Nicola Sansanelli (1891-1968) soldier and founder (with Aurelio Padovano) of the Naples Fascist organisation; held various official posts but practiced as a lawyer in Naples where he tried to prevent the arrest of Jewish lawyers. Remaining in Naples when the Allies invaded in 1943, he was arrested and sentenced to ten years in gaol but later amnestied and became a monarchist, and even Mayor of Naples for a brief time. The "Honourable Graziadei" he mentions in his sarcastic comment is Antonio Graziadei (1872-1953), another of the PCd'I deputies and then still Professor of Economics at the University of Rome. He was not one of Gramsci's Ordinovisti followers but had shared a room in the Hotel Lux with him in Moscow so he too entered the Central Committee of the PCd'I, after Bordiga's arrest in 1923 and the removal of his followers from the leadership. He was not arrested in 1926 like most of the other deputies but left Italy for France in 1928 (the year he was expelled from the PCd'I over his questioning of the basis of Marxist economics in the labour theory of value). He was readmitted to the new PCI of Togliatti in 1945.
28. Giorgio Mortara (1885-1967) is regarded as one of the founders of Italian economic statistics, and Damen is citing his famous 1921 work Prospettive Economiche. Although he accepted the Fascist Party card in 1933 he emigrated to Brazil in 1938 where he continued his work on economic statistics until his death in Rio de Janeiro.
29. Egidio Gennari (1876-1942) was General Secretary of the PSI but left it to become a founding member of the PCd'I at Livorno in 1921. A supporter of Gramsci, the Comintern Executive Committee assigned him as well as Gramsci, Scoccimarro, Togliatti, Tasca and Terracini to replace the Left leadership when Bordiga was arrested in 1923. Gennari was, like Damen and Gramsci, elected as a deputy in 1924. He fled to the USSR when the arrest of PCd'I deputies began in 1926 and died in Gorky.
30. FIOT (Federazione Italiana Operai Tessili), the textile workers' union, was formed in 1901 and took the name Italian Federation of Textile Workers in 1910. It agreed not to support strikes in 1917(!) in return for being allowed to bargain with employers. Affiliated to the General Confederation of Labour (CGdL) it was about to lose the right to speak for workers in 1925 and would be banned in 1934.

31. Achille Loria (1857-1943) was an early critic of Marx and considered that all problems of economics stemmed from a lack of land. He was a member of the Italian Senate from 1919. Gramsci was even then naming him as a fake Marxist (like Mussolini) in his critique of the idea that Italy was a "proletarian nation" so the class struggle became the national struggle. See *https://www.marxists.org/archive/gramsci/1925/05/intro_party_school.htm*
32. Roberto Tremelloni (1900-87), Unitary Socialist, like Matteotti and Turati, he was an economist who later emigrated to Switzerland to become professor at the University of Geneva. He would hold various academic and government posts after the fall of Fascism.
33. Reference to Musollini's speech, mentioned in the introduction, in which he took responsibility for the violence associated with the Fascist movement.
34. See footnote 6 above.
35. Gino Baldesi (1879-1934), member of the PSI before 1914, he was pro-intervention in the First World War and a Unitary Socialist after it. After Mussolini came to power, attempted to join his government but, after the murder of his colleague Matteotti, became a leader of the Aventine Secession before once again trying to work with the Fascists, who rejected his proposal for a revival of the unions. Retired from political activity in 1926.
36. FILIL (Federazione Italiano di Lavoratori de Legno) was the wood workers' union – another union suppressed by Fascism.
37. Attilio Teruzzi (1882-1950) "Teruzzi's cursus honorum, achieved through violence, abuses of power, moral double standards and an unquestioning loyalty to Mussolini, comprises positions as vice-secretary of the Fascist National Party, Member of Parliament, Governor of Cyrenaica, National Commander of the Blackshirts (including during the Spanish Civil War), Undersecretary to the Minister of Colonies, and Minister of "Italian Africa". After Mussolini fell in 1943, Teruzzi joined the Republic of Salò. At the end of the war, he was sentenced to thirty years and incarcerated on the island of Procida, off the coast of Naples; amnestied and freed in 1950, he died soon afterwards." Gigliola Sulis in *https://www.the-tls.com/history/twentieth-century-onwards-history/the-perfect-fascist-victoria-de-grazia-review-gigliola-sulis-attilio-teruzzi*
38. Regions where the Fascist trade unions organised a series of strikes in response to the rising cost of living.
39. Damen was not in the Chamber on 12 March so Farinacci took the opportunity to once again slander him over the alleged forgery for which he had been acquitted. Damen again refuted this in a further exchange on 13 March. See *https://storia.camera.it/regno/lavori/PDF/RI_LEG27/unica/02499.pdf*



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The Russian Revolution remains a landmark event in history. For the bourgeois historians, the October Revolution is thought to be a tragedy that set back the achievements of the "democratic" February Revolution, and allowed the Bolsheviks to wreak havoc on their citizens and the world. For the Stalinists, the events of 1917 paved the way for the birth of the USSR, which they point to as a prototypical example of "socialism in one country". In reality, the February and October Revolutions were both part of the same proletarian revolution

About the Communist Workers' Organisation

The Communist Workers' Organisation is part of the Internationalist Communist Tendency which was inspired by the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista). Formed during the Second World War in 1943, the PCInt. condemned both sides as imperialist. Its roots go back to the Italian Communist Left which had fought the degeneration of the Communist International and the Stalinisation imposed on all its member parties. Today there are ICT affiliates in several countries.

We are internationalists. We believe that the interests of the exploited are the same all over the world, and that communism cannot be achieved in one country, a myth peddled by Stalinism. Stalinism was never communism but a particular form of capitalism, state capitalism. After 1917 the economic blockade of the Soviet Union and the failure of the world revolution in the West meant that the revolution was transformed into its opposite, eventually becoming an imperialist bloc that would collapse after only seventy years. We are opposed to all (Trotskyists, Maoists) claims that state capitalism in whatever form is socialism.

We aim to be a political reference point for the working class, first of all for those who are tired of the unions, all unions. This does not mean giving up on the fight to defend immediate interests (wages, hours, work rates, etc.). But the unions are now a tool to control the class struggle and manage the labour force on behalf of capital. Today, any 'self-organised struggle', has to go outside of and against the unions. However, rank and file unions are a blunt instrument for workers. Even when they win a particular battle if they settle into a permanent existence they must accept the legal and economic framework imposed by the state. Any attempt to maintain a permanent body to defend workers' immediate economic interests will fail.

The only permanent body the working class can establish today is the political organisation, which is not only possible but essential. The starting point for this must be recognising that the general interest of the class lies in getting rid of capitalism. This is only possible through a revolution, i.e. the overthrow of the existing state and establishment of a new form of political power by the proletariat. The road to revolution does not mean the futile attempt to win control of the existing state via elections to parliaments or local governments which are means for the capitalist class to exercise its rule. History has shown us that the forum of our "democracy", the bodies of power of the revolution, will be the workers' councils, (or soviets) – mass meetings in which delegates will be entrusted with specific mandates and will be recallable at any time. But these potentially revolutionary organisations will be undermined by capitalist forces from within if they do not have a clear programme aimed at the abolition of exploitation and, therefore, the elimination of classes, for a society of "freely associated producers" who work together to directly meet human needs.

The programme is not the creation of any single theorist or one organisation. It is the

outcome of the key lessons learned from past and present struggles and as such defines the practical way forward for the working class as a whole. Without a clear political compass the working class movement will be prey to all kinds of capitalist tricks and illusions. Thus political clarification and reorganisation today are vital for a revolutionary party to come into being which is in a position to win over the working class to the revolutionary programme. This is not a party of government that would replace the class and its class-wide organs of power, but a party of agitation and political guidance on the basis of that programme.

We are for the party, but we are not that party or its only embryo. Our task is to participate in its construction, trying to link immediate demands to the historical programme; communism.

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AURORA

Capitalist Crisis: Survival of the Richest

Months of soaring inflation and stalling wages are the latest effects of the crisis inherent to the capitalist system. The ruling class' attacks on our living and working conditions are just one more attempt to make us pay for it. As winter approaches, the havoc wreaked by the failures of the system show no signs of letting up.

Workers Getting the Worst of a Bad Lot

The rise in the prices of basic food and drink items has been steady and unrelenting. In the 12 months leading up to September 2022 they have increased by 14.6% – the sharpest since 1980 – with every single month seeing a new increase. In the same period, the cost of motor fuel rose by 26.9%, while transport costs rose by 10.9%. Water, energy and household related costs rose by 20.2% – although "luckily", we could be set to save untold amounts on gas and electric costs over winter when, according to the National Grid, the supply of energy could fall short of demand by up to a sixth, meaning potential "managed blackouts" in January and February.

As more households face the choice to "eat or heat" over the winter, already over 90% of food banks report an increase in the need for their services since the start of the year. Homelessness is also increasing rapidly, with numbers having increased by 19% in the first three months of 2022 alone). As costs of goods, rent and bills rise for businesses too, the bosses will continue to shift the brunt of the consequences onto the shoulders of workers. Scrimping on health and safety, forcing workers to come to work sick with Covid, and cutting corners on training to make up the numbers of deliberately understaffed workforces, and knowingly putting lives at risk by greenlighting unsafe products.

The effects of the bosses' flagrant recklessness with our health and safety both at home and at work are not hard to predict. Vicious cycles of infection and reinfection with Covid as well as flu and other seasonal illnesses, the overwhelming of hospitals, and the soaring rates of depression, anxiety, substance abuse, and suicide that are bound to accompany increased instability, debt, and financial hardship paint a very bleak picture indeed for the winter ahead.

The ruling class have suggested that we "tighten our belts" and have even shown us that actually we can eat food with mould on it, that if you're depressed it's "ok to talk", and that in fact a good blackout might be just the thing we need to teach us some gratitude for the luxury of when the lights do come on. Meanwhile they fight amongst themselves for the privilege of steering their sinking ship. But as a class we are becoming ever-increasingly aware that what we need is not a new captain with new insulting "solutions" that keep their order intact.

A Crisis with a History

The so-called 'cost of living crisis' is not simply due to rising inflation. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine have only compounded a crisis decades in the making. Through a combination of the financialisation, outsourcing, deskilling, and austerity the ruling class have been able to continue squeezing profits out of the working class. But ever since the 1970s we have been on a downward spiral, with whole sectors of production and jobs dismantled and wages as a percentage of GDP dropping. Investment in 'the real economy' gave way to financial speculation based on ever-more ingenious ways of multiplying fictitious capital, especially 'slicing and dicing' mortgage loans. The crash of 2007/8 did for a few big financial names but without state intervention, homelessness and joblessness would have been worse than after the 1929 stock market crash. As it was, a whole generation of workers had their eyes opened: they had been told capitalism and crashes were a thing of the past. In fact it was only a sign of things to come. Now, already up to our ears in debt and working in precarious jobs with no future worth thinking about, we are facing the longest recession since records began.

It is in the face of such stark workers' resistance to the capitalist crisis has been largely on defensive grounds, each time ultimately thwarted by the bosses and their state. Will this time be different?

Class Struggle is Back on the Agenda!

The capitalist crisis is intensifying and with it come the inevitable attacks on the working class. Cost of living and fuel protests have broken out in more than 90 countries already and the UK is no exception. Strikes on an unprecedented (since in sixteen) are expected to be balloted for strike action in the coming months. The struggle for wages to keep up with inflation is on. Even before the pandemic, which killed more than 200,000 in the UK, finally eased up, and the Covid-19 restrictions were lifted in February 2022, the first signs of the coming resistance were making their appearance.

Strikes and Protests

In January there were strikes by scaffolders calling for better pay. In February there were strikes over pensions at schools and universities, and small protests about the cost of living and the desperate situation in the NHS. In March, the London Tube strike began over threats to jobs and pensions, and there were protests in support of sacked P&O workers. April saw strikes by oil refinery workers over an insulting pay offer. In May, postal workers went on strike as they had their wages frozen for the previous year, followed by a wave of wildcat strikes. Refuse collectors in Welwyn Hatfield, construction workers in Hull, offshore oil workers in the North Sea, workers at a food plant in Bury, all took matters into their own hands and did not wait to go through the official process. In June, there were more strikes in the Royal Mail, a construction firm in Glasgow, Cygnet Fees and, of course, railway strikes.

At this point the establishment media began to warn of "class war" and ran a vitriolic campaign to discredit striking workers. In July, 87 workers started their strikes, the first nationwide action at the company in 35 years. There were also strikes on the buses, and further action in the Royal Mail and on the railways. In August, council workers went on strike, and there was another wave of wildcat action, this time by Amazon workers at various sites, and contract workers, including scaffolders and maintenance workers, at various refineries and chemical plants. In September, offshore oil workers in the North Sea, despite condemnation from both the unions and the employers, went on strike again, organised by their own strike committee. That month there were also strikes by dockers at Felixstowe and Liverpool ports (with impressive 24hr pickets). Finally, October saw the continuation of many of the previously mentioned strikes, and the resignation of Liz Truss as her government collapsed following the unveiling of the disastrous mini-budget for the rich. And more is yet to come this winter, as rising energy bills truly hit home.

Workers Can Pose their Own Alternative

Appeals to the capitalist state to resolve this crisis are bound to end up in disillusionment. All over the world the ruling class parties, whether left or right wing, are out of ideas – the political chaos in the UK is not unique, it is only a symptom of a system in freefall. The ruling class has only two things on offer: more attacks on workers to boost their profits and, ultimately, war. Dreams of a return to the past, of decent wages and welfare of the 'golden age' are just that – dreams, and just that, dreams. So what is to be done?

The current resistance is an important starting point. But if we let the ruling class isolate us sector by sector, workplace by workplace, we will lose. The offensive of the bosses, who have money and the law on their side, calls for thinking outside the box. We can already see examples of that. When unions in the North Sea were reluctant to take action, workers set up their own strike committee to load the way. When ships were rerouted from Liverpool to break the strike, dockers in Southampton refused to handle them. It is this kind of self-organisation and solidarity that can level the playing field and act beyond the limiting framework of the unions (which, as we saw during the Queen's funeral, can suspend our actions without even consulting the membership). On picket lines across the country the chant 'The workers united will never be defeated!' is meaningful, but it needs to become a reality. We need to call on others to the government to save us is a dead-end, then workers need their own political alternative. Without such a vision, we are looking at a future of gradual immiseration on a planet of collapsing societies and ecosystems. We believe that only in a world without classes, states, money, and borders, can economic crises, wars, and climate disasters be averted. To that end, we are building a political organisation fit for the task, a reference point for the global working class. If workers play by the rules (set up by the bosses) or delegate their power away (to parliamentary parties) this better future can never come.

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